

DRAGON+



R.A. SALVATORE: 30 YEARS OF DRIZZT!

Top World-
Building Tips!

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW:
Mordenkainen's
Tome Of Foes

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

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ISSUE 19

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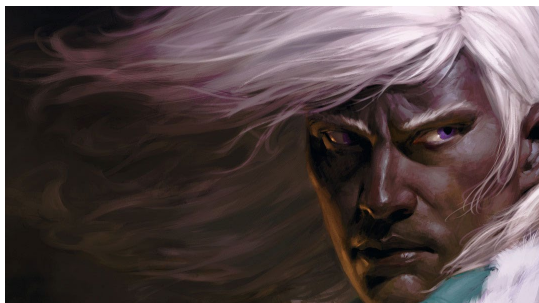
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Imagining the Ampersand

Artist Aleksi Briclot on mastering a new style to bring R.A. Salvatore's Drizzt to life.



The Crystal Shard: 30th Anniversary

Author R.A. Salvatore transports us three decades into the past to witness the birth of his iconic dark elf, Drizzt Do'Urden.



The Legacy of Drizzt

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New DMs Guild columnist Shawn Merwin takes a trip into the Ruins of Matolo with fellow Guild Adept Cindy Moore.



Dragon Classic

From the Dragon archives, we look back at the gith... both -yanki and -zerai!



Streaming Highlights

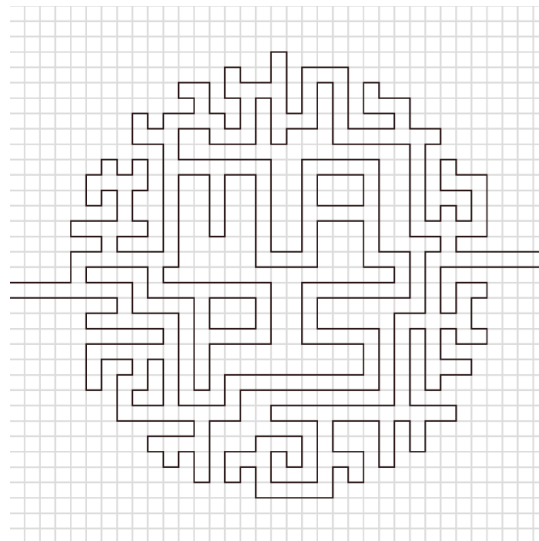
This issue's media highlights

include villains with a heart, a well-wicked wiki and the universe's most dangerous birdcage.



Unearthed Arcana: Order Domain

Mike Mearls introduces a new cleric order that prizes obedience to the law above all else...



Maps of the Month

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Comic: D&D Toons

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Next Issue: Dragon+ 20

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DRAGON+ 19

Welcome to Issue 19

Bart Carroll on authors and anniversaries...

Is it possible? *The Crystal Shard* debuted 30 years ago, back in 1988. If this were a wedding anniversary, the traditional gift would be pearls, but we've instead chosen to dedicate this issue to R.A. Salvatore and his famed dark elf creation—Drizzt Do'urden.

R.A. Salvatore recently visited Wizards of the Coast, heading up an author discussion on world-building. As part of this event, he talked about basing the Menzoberranzan houses on conflicts inherent within *The Godfather*, and Drizzt's sisters on his own (growing up in a household with five older sisters apparently left its indelible mark). He also spoke about how as a writer, he uses Drizzt and his other characters to help explore questions he himself didn't always have answers for (which struck me as particularly useful advice as a person who writes and wrestles with his own questions regarding "life, the universe and everything").

It was a solid talk, and well received. R.A. stayed afterward to sign copies of his current book (*Child of a Mad God*), and it should be noted that Drizzt returns later this fall with *Timeless*. Hence, the cover of this issue!

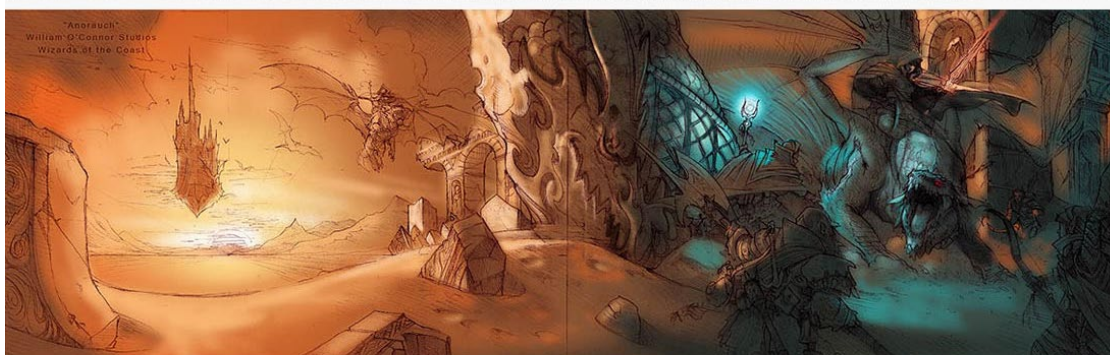
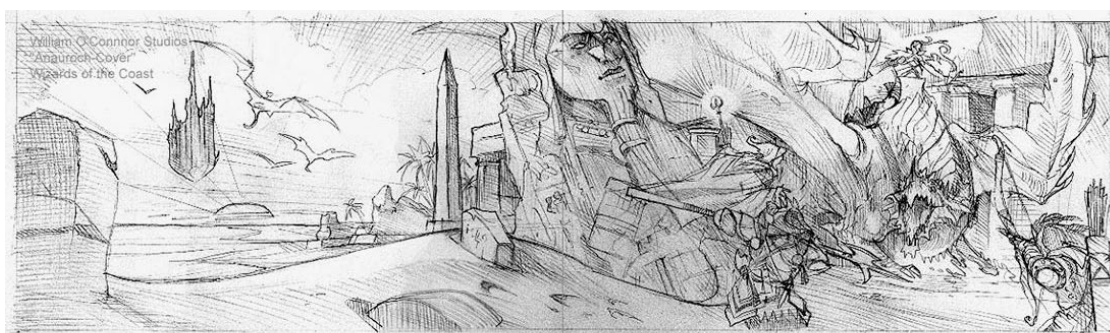
I have many fond memories reading R.A. Salvatore's books, particularly *The Crystal Shard*. I had just gone off to college (UW Wisconsin), and it must be admitted, had trouble finding my place there. So it was a welcome invitation when the student across my dorm hall (Sellery) showed me the copy of *The Crystal Shard* he'd brought with him. Although I grew up playing the game, I'd never read a D&D novel up until that point, but talking over the book with him helped open a door to common interests. An attempted D&D campaign we started didn't take, but I found others there that did—

and I now also had a huge supply of new fantasy literature to enjoy. This would have been 1992, so there was not only the entirety of the *Icewind Dale* but also the *Dark Elf* trilogies to devour, and I eagerly awaited each new book in the *Legacy of the Drow* series. With many of these books, I read them at home during the summers, walking out to an isolated pond in Fort Sheridan where no one could interrupt me.

This issue, we sit down with R.A. Salvatore and talk more about his characters and works that have similarly connected with so many other readers through the years. From novels, Drizzt has also seen many incarnations within the D&D game itself, which we also wanted to touch upon.

All that, plus our usual offerings of maps, cartoons, livestream highlights and so much more!

In Memoriam



Work by William O'Connell (select to view)

Earlier this year, we lost a member of the artistic community with the passing of William O'Connor. To offer some acknowledgement of his years of work and friendship with us here at Wizards of the Coast, we wanted to share a few words in tribute as well as showcase just some of his much-appreciated art.

Kate Irwin, Senior Art Director, contributed the following, which helps express much about his relationships with folks here at Wizards of the Coast:

Kate: Professionally, William O'Connor was one of the 'ribs' of D&D 4th Edition, working as both a concept artist and providing hundreds of pieces of art for publication. He was a great collaborator, often taking an image in a direction neither I nor the writers expected, looking for the story while staying true to the heart of the piece. I chose him for the first Forgotten Realms cover I commissioned (Ed Greenwood's *Anauroch*), and it is still one of my favorite pieces. I even have the sketch and color rough he did for the piece. And, just one good example of his self-deprecating humor—when he turned in the final, he wrote to me:

“I really hope you like it, because I think it is one of the best designs that I have come up with all year. I’m my own worst critic, but I really like this one.”

Then at the very end of his email, he added:

“I spent like three hours doing the shading on the upper lip. It’s probably the best drawing I’ve ever done.”

—N. Dynamite

Personally, he was a generous, kind, and thoughtful man with a sharp sense of humor; the type of person you’re lucky to have in your circle of friends. William will be missed.

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Imagining the Ampersand

Artist Aleksi Briclot on mastering a new style to bring R.A. Salvatore's Drizzt to life.

When we call illustrator Aleksi Briclot to chat about his latest interpretation of fabled dark elf Drizzt, we interrupt the game of *Overwatch* he's playing with his girlfriend. "No problem," he says, speaking from his Paris abode, as he pops down the controller.

It's no surprise to find Briclot gaming, as the pastime plays such a big part in his life. His illustrations have **graced *Magic: The Gathering* cards** for 15 years, including his high-profile representations of the first five Planeswalkers, which he says brought a lot of attention from that game's players. He's also created concept art for video games and an illustration for a board game, before going on to found his own video games company, Dontnod.

"Dontnod is a palindrome, with a symmetry on the T. Because this was my first company, and there were just five of us in the beginning, we had to generate everything ourselves and use that to find a main investor and more key people. We created a video game called *Remember Me*, which was published by Capcom, and more recently developed *Life is Strange*, which was quite successful."

That gaming influence crosses over into the world of Dungeons & Dragons fiction, where Briclot has previously created covers for the R.A. Salvatore trilogy *Archmage*, *Maestro*, and *Hero*. However, that didn't mean he was automatically first choice for the latest Drizzt novel.

“What is funny is that the three previous covers were done in quite a realistic painting style, which is what I use most of the time. For the new cover, they were looking for something quite different—it's all about brush strokes and the graphic line. Because I don't have a lot of images like that in my portfolio, at first they weren't sure that I would be able to deliver what they wanted.



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“I successfully convinced them that I could try a new style, although as a professional that is sometimes harder. Often you have a style that brings clients to you, because they've seen something in your previous work they've liked. It's not like in art school, where you can try different styles and different techniques quite as often. But they were confident enough to trust me and to give me this opportunity, so I'm really happy.”

Was this a completely new style for you?

I had already done a few personal projects in this style. My work on *Archmage*, *Maestro* and *Hero* was completely digital, which is my usual way of working. I paint on my computer, using internal layers and brushstrokes to create realistic renderings. On this project they gave me some reference because they were trying something like Sumi art, which is a Japanese art using brushstrokes. It's black and

white and you have just one light and one line to create a strong image. Shauna [Narciso, Senior Creative Director] sent me references of a cat made just of brushstrokes and told me that was what they were looking for.



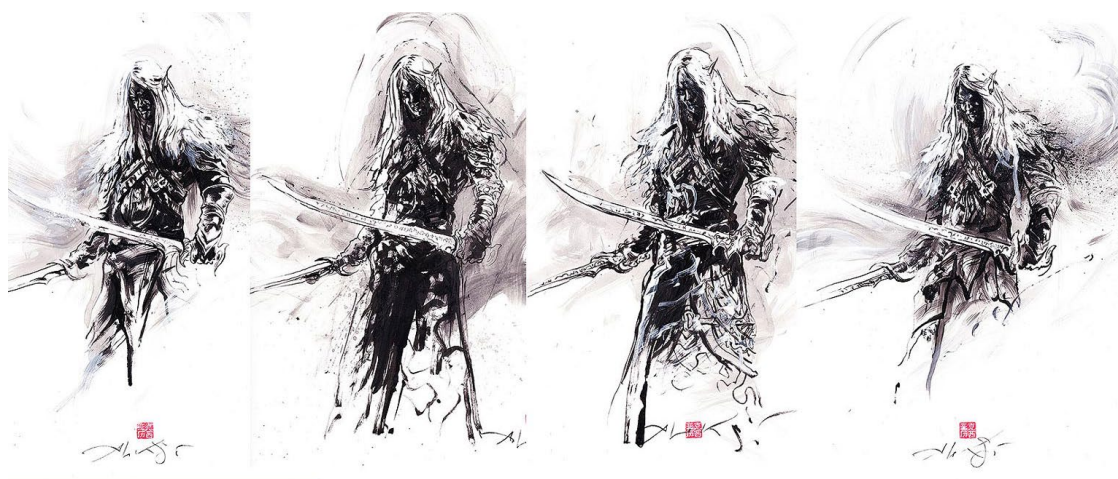
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So I changed my process in order to change the outcome, working more traditionally. I took some papers and tried to paint Drizzt using bamboo brushes, doing it four times in a row. The idea was to get more confidence from the first one, using fewer brushstrokes with just black ink and a little white paint. I'd finish one and then begin again immediately, repeating the same procedure. It was like warming up. As I went on, my line was more confident and much more powerful than the first time. Then I did the same for the black panther and had to composite those digitally. On top of that I did the gold, which was quite exciting because I had to develop another process.

Sumi art often appears very ink-washed. Has the application of the gold moved it away from that?

Not too much. The main difference is that I used an inverted or negative version, so a lot of the black inks became gold and the white paper became black. I then put the gold on top of the black, which became white. That's why it's quite different from the Sumi feeling, even though it's been created using the same brushstrokes and effects.

Also, in my mind I wasn't doing the usual realistic illustration of the character, with his panther and a background setting featuring some enemies. I wanted to go for something elegant, which doesn't show everything. What I like about this style is its suggestion.



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For me as a storyteller and an illustrator, suggestion is the most powerful thing. Just being able to show something and create a feeling, but not have Drizzt in full size with all of the usual detail, means the audience is more involved with your illustration. They can recognize him but it takes the mind of the audience to fill in some of those blanks, so they are involved in deciphering the image and understanding what it's about.

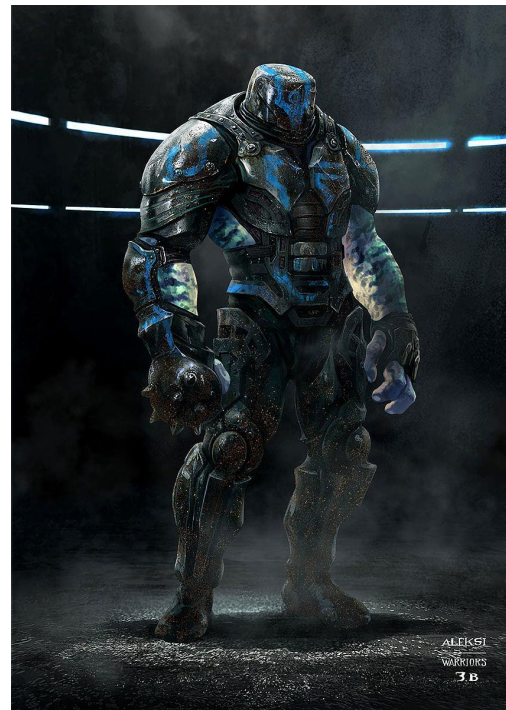
In describing your wider work, would you say there's a comic-book feel, even on the video games?

That's definitely why Marvel Studios hired me to create concept art. I've worked for the studio on different movies for two years, including six months spent on *Thor: Ragnarok*. Working on those movies is a dream come true because Marvel comic books were one of my first crushes when I was young. That was the moment I was beginning to draw, when I was reading stories about the X-Men and the Avengers. So it's quite funny to end up working on a live movie featuring some of those characters.

Is there a difference between creating a cover for a Drizzt novel and creating concept art for a movie?

I do a lot of illustration and a lot

of concept art, and it's not exactly the same thing. When you're making an illustration, you're trying to get a good idea into one picture. When you're creating concept art, it's all about solving issues and finding more ideas, which is something I like doing because the brain is really involved.

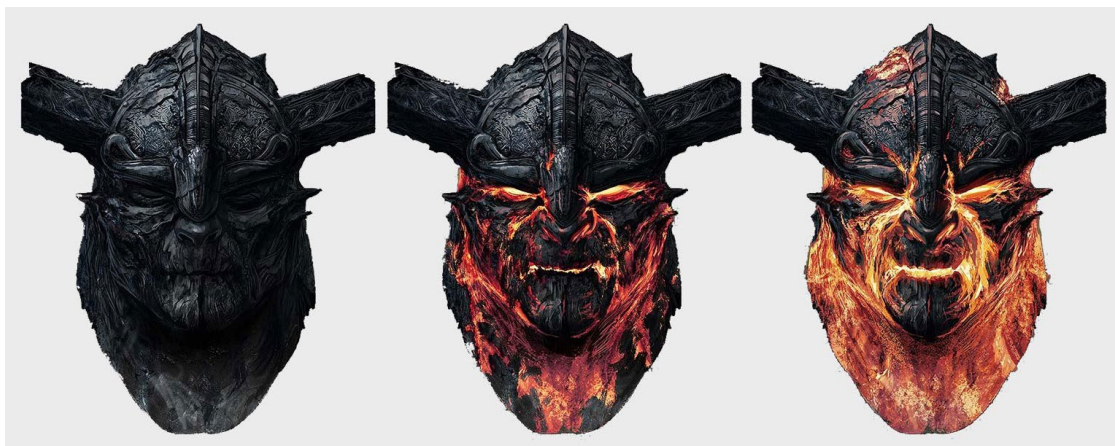


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It's also sometimes painful. In *Thor*, my big guy is onscreen at the end of the film, which is good because I did something like 60 different versions of the head and the body. But for some other characters I did lots of iterations and finally it's not my work that gets approved. I have to tell myself that that's OK, it's part of the job, because it is a team effort and I'm a part of the process. I'm really happy if my ideas are feeding the machine and some of them are ending up on the screen, but it's not always the case.

The suit you drew for the main character in *Thor: Ragnarok* references Jack Kirby. Was he an influence on you?

Thor: Ragnarok director Taika Waititi wanted to refer directly to Jack Kirby so he gave us some pieces that he really liked as an inspiration to develop the world of Sakaar, the planet of the Grandmaster. Everything was built around the idea of that reference—the same pattern, dynamic lines, trying to get the vibe close to Kirby. It was really refreshing to do because Kirby's style is very graphic. It's always a challenge to use only a 2D reference like this and put it into a live-action movie, where there is motion and depth.



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Have you continued to work for Marvel on the *Avengers: Infinity War* movies?

I have but I can't tell you anything about it.

Would it be fair to say your walls are filled with images of a bluish-looking alien wearing a very impressive glove?

I could say, 'Yes.'

Where can we expect to see your work next in the D&D multiverse?

I like to create characters and illustrations and I've been to the Wizards of the Coast offices several times in the past for concept pushes on *Magic: The Gathering*. This involves a team of concept artists working for three weeks, throwing around ideas and creating the next style guide. It's very exciting because at the end you have a new world and a new setting. I am going there again to develop new concepts for D&D.

What will that process be like?

I think it will be very similar to *Magic: The Gathering*. It'll be developing ideas with other artists in the same room: five artists from outside Wizards of the Coast, with two art directors and some in-house concept artists, including lead concept artist Richard Whitters. So it's quite a big team.

The best working process is not to have everyone isolated but to share. Each day we'll put our concepts on the wall and every two days there's a review with the art director and the key designers. It's interesting because everyone on the team can come and see what you are working on and as there are quite a few of us, each day there are

new pictures to see. It's like refreshing a web page.

To see more of Aleksi Briclot's work, visit his [ArtStation page](#) or connect with him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

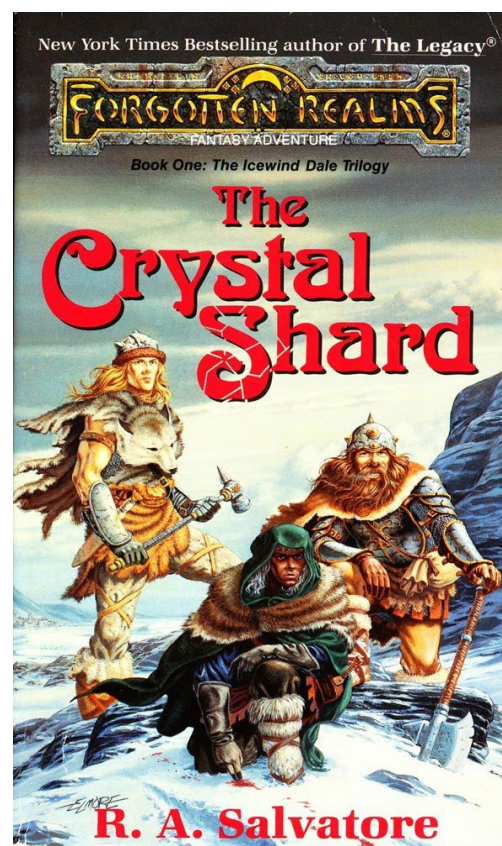
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The Crystal Shard: 30th Anniversary

Author R.A. Salvatore transports us three decades into the past to witness the birth of his iconic dark elf, Drizzt Do'Urden.

“The last number I heard, which someone cobbled together, is that I’ve sold thirty million Drizzt books. That’s a lot of people!” says R.A. Salvatore as we discuss the success of the Forgotten Realms’ most famous dark elf. As with any author you’ll speak to who’s had that kind of impact, it didn’t come easy. It took resilience from a man who was busy establishing a career in a completely different field to look past the knockbacks and continue with his passion project.

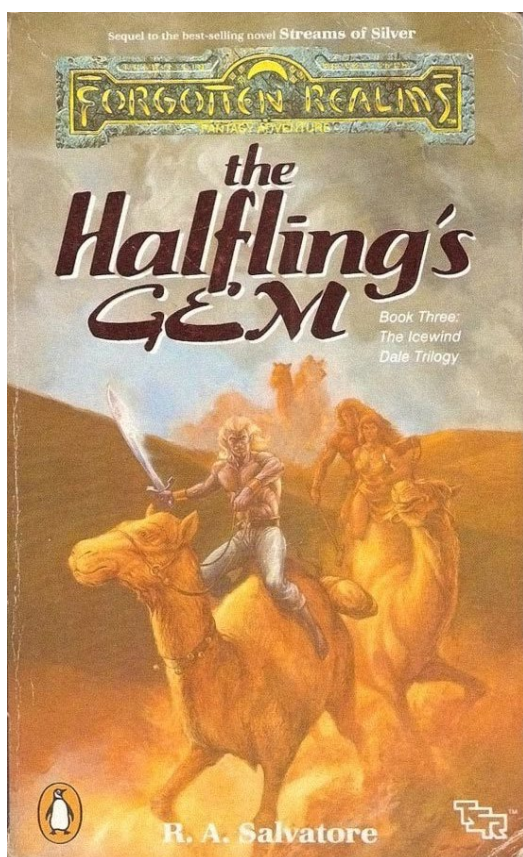


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“I had written a book back in 1983 and gotten the usual rejection letters. I’m married and the kids come along and I’m building my finance career and never expecting to be a writer. But when my wife would work nights and we’d get the kids into bed, I’d work on the book. I finally had it where I thought it was good enough in 1987, so I sent it out to a bunch of publishers. One of those was TSR, which was accepting unsolicited manuscripts. They couldn’t take the book I’d written but asked me to audition instead,” he recalls.

“Those rejection letters made me mad and I decided that I had to prove them wrong. I always said that if I got one book published I’d be happy, and I meant it. I figured even if I didn’t sell any copies, that would do it and I would be fine. I didn’t expect a career. Now here we are thirty years and sixty-plus books later!”

For all the joy TSR’s backing brought, landing that first commission didn’t suddenly make



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Salvatore a full-time writer. “I remember they paid me this tiny royalty and I wrote *The Crystal Shard*. I didn’t quit my job obviously because I’m not going to support a family of five, with three little kids, on that kind of

money. But in the summer of 1988 I got the deal to do the second book and when that came out in 1990, that’s when TSR said, ‘We really want three books and these are taking off and you should think about quitting your day job.’ So it was almost by accident because I never expected a second or a third book. When *The Halfling’s Gem* made the *New York Times* list, I finally quit my job.”

BEST SELLERS

Cracking the *New York Times* bestseller list especially at that time was a big deal. There was no internet and therefore no way to generate sales through online retailers. Get your name on the *Times* list, however, and suddenly it opened up a whole new set of markets your work otherwise wouldn’t have gotten into.

“When TSR said to me, ‘We’re getting a ton of mail from people who want to know where this character came from, so we want to do a trilogy,’ that’s when I decided to take a chance. I was terrified, because here I am walking out of a decent job and now I don’t have insurance, and I have three kids. But my wife supported me through

it,” Salvatore says.

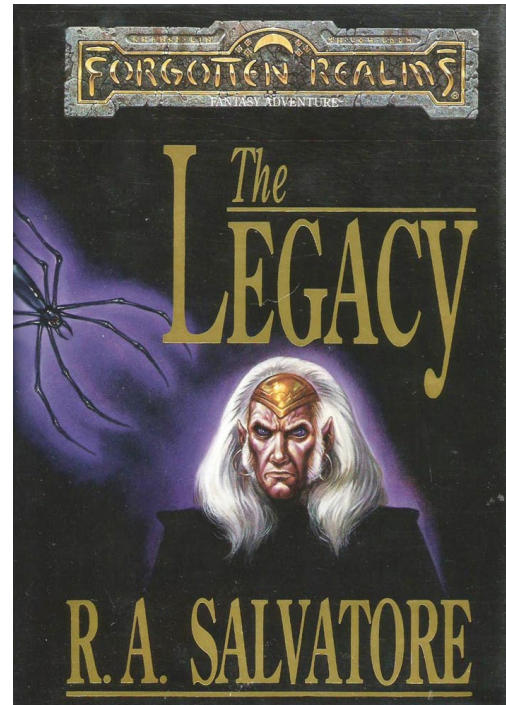
“When I really became secure was when I did *The Legacy*, as that was the first hardcover book. Hardcovers are much better for authors as they’re a higher price point and a higher royalty rate. When *The Legacy* came out, they anticipated it would sell 15,000 hardcovers, and it sold 140,000 in the first couple of months.

“And that’s when I knew my life had changed, when I realized that I wasn’t going to have to keep all my other job options open, and I was OK. That was really when I knew I was a writer, and I was going to stay a writer for a long time.”

In a nod to the past, the same connection to the fans which prompted TSR to commission more books is still a good guide that Salvatore is on the right track. Having recently been translated into Portuguese, he’s started getting letters from Drizzt fans in Brazil. When his new book *Timeless* was officially announced, it also provoked a big response on social media.

“I think because everyone thought the Drizzt books were over, when I put the announcement up on my Facebook page I had like 330,000 views and tens of thousands of shares and likes. It was crazy.”

Fans were celebrating with the author, but which Salvatore were they interacting with: R.A. or Bob?



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R.A. Salvatore (Select to view)

DUAL PERSONAS

“I’ve spent a lot of time trying to keep Bob Salvatore and R.A. Salvatore as two different people. In my life as Bob Salvatore, I play softball and work every day like all my friends and don’t even care about the rest of it. I’m R.A. Salvatore when I’m on the road or doing interviews. And R.A. Salvatore always surprises me because I just don’t think about it that much.

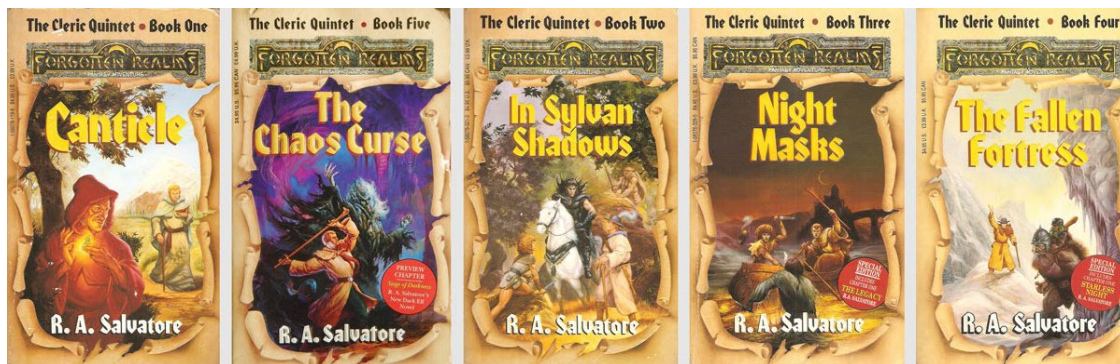
“One thing you have to get over as an author is the fear. Publishing is terrifying. You’re putting yourself out there and people are going to say rotten things about you. That’s just what happens. So it’s always surreal to me to actually meet someone who’s reading my books. I’m always surprised. I sit down to do a signing at a convention and I’m there for three hours. I don’t expect it and it catches me off guard.”

In an age where the news changes hourly—never mind every day or week or month—Salvatore says it’s nice to know that you’re still relevant, especially when he hasn’t been out on the road for a while. Yet it’s the range of readers he’s meeting that adds to the experience.

“The biggest thrill I’m having now is finding out that families are

sharing my work. People who have been reading my books for years are now reading them with their kids and even grandkids. That just warms my heart. Whenever I do a signing I feel like I'm at a Fleetwood Mac concert because you have grandparents there with their kids and their grandkids."

The fanbase isn't the only thing that's changed. The original commission to write *The Crystal Shard* came with a pretty tight deadline. "I got the contract on July 11, which was based on an outline that changed rather dramatically. I had to have the book in on October 1. So it was only ten weeks," he explains. "It wasn't the shortest deadline I ever had. I remember while I was in the middle of writing *The Cleric Quintet* and they called me and said, 'Huge news, we want a hardcover from you but it's got to be a dark elf book. Bad news we need it in six weeks.' And I had to write *The Legacy* in just six weeks."



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All these years later and—as you'd imagine—the process is very different. "I don't do that anymore. Now I can do two books a year but they're fully six-month projects. I'm in a much more easy rhythm and I don't get stressed because I know how much work I can do if I have to, so I don't have to do it all in a rush. One thing they should teach every author at a writer's conference is to be on time. Publishers frown on authors who deliver late, even when you've written as many books as I have. Delivering late hurts everyone in the process: it hurts the publicity and marketing teams, the sales, everything."



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THE WRITE STUFF

With a new dark elf trilogy underway, you might expect Salvatore's study to be a mass of Post-It Notes, carefully plotting out the story strands. It's interesting to dig down into his writing process and find that he might have finished one book already, and an outline for a second, but that doesn't mean he knows where the tale will end. Given that Drizzt Do'Urden was created on a whim as a sidekick for Wulfgar, before taking center stage in the fantasy series as the author wrote *The Crystal Shard*, perhaps that shouldn't be such a surprise.

"Everything's organic with me, which makes people crazy. I'll turn in an outline and then change the book," he admits. "When I'm playing a game and I'm the Dungeon Master, where the players tell me they want to go, we go. And I'm the same way with characters in my books. If they say we're going here and it's a complete turn from what I expected, that's where we're going because they said so."

"It's more fun for me that way, I don't know what's going to happen on the next page sometimes. People think I'm crazy because if the dwarves start telling jokes, I start laughing. It's like I'm hearing the joke for the first time. And when I'm writing like that, it's almost as if I'm reading the book instead of writing it. That's probably why I write so fast because I want to know what the hell's going on!"

Even more exciting is the new beginning *Timeless* provides. From his book signings, Salvatore is aware that not everyone in the room is up to date with his Forgotten Realms books. So much so that he has to

be careful to warn the audience about what they ask, because he doesn't want them ruining the stories for other readers.

"As far as I'm concerned, *The Legend of Drizzt* is a series that ended with *Hero*. Now I'm telling the stories beyond that, and Drizzt is a big part of them, but it's almost like a second series of Drizzt," he says. "I wanted somebody to be able to enjoy this without having read anything that went before it although I hope they'll go back and read them all."

The same applies to the latest addition to Salvatore's *Demon Wars* series. *Child of a Mad God* might be the eleventh book in that collection, but he feels it's an ideal starting point for someone dipping their toe into that world.



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"If someone came up to me and said, 'I want to read your *Demon Wars* books, where should I start?' I would give them *Child of a Mad God*. It's brand new so you don't have to have read anything before, and I think it's as good as anything I've ever written."

It also borrows from the author's love of history. Sharp-eyed readers may see the name of the central character, Aoleyn, and correctly deduce she's influenced by Henry the VIII's wife Anne Boleyn.

"Absolutely. I took out a couple of Ns, an E and a B," Salvatore says with a smile. "I watched *The Tudors* and when Natalie Dormer came on the show as Anne Boleyn I thought her portrayal was amazing. I love that character because when you dig down and look at the things she did away from Henry, here's someone who gained power she was not supposed to have through her wit. But when I say she's the inspiration, I didn't write a book about Anne Boleyn, I simply used that same kind of gumption, that willingness to go out on a limb and take a chance. Hopefully Aoleyn will keep her head, but you never

know.”



(Select to view)

LEGACY OF DRIZZT

If Aoleyn can become as iconic as Drizzt Do'Urden, she'll have been a major success. Over the years, the character of Drizzt has transcended the novels and appeared in many different settings and games. Some of those have been created by Salvatore himself—he worked with Cryptic on a quest line for the *Neverwinter* MMORPG—and some are a complete surprise to the author.

“Drizzt has become this iconic figure in pop culture. I'll see him here and there, and the character is bigger than me at this point, which is kinda fun. There was a guy creating cartoons for NFL football games and when the Oakland Raiders played the Carolina Panthers, he had orcs coming down a mountain and Drizzt and Guenhwyvar chasing them.

“I remember the first time I was playing *Baldur's Gate* and my character is moving down towards this forest and there's this dark elf with two scimitars killing gnolls. He's like, 'Help me kill these gnolls' and I think, 'Boy this guy looks familiar' and it's Drizzt! I

didn't know he was in the game.”

“I went to Dragon Con and twenty dark elves showed up to march in the parade. It's crazy to me how big it's become. I never expected it and I don't think I'm fully aware of it—my sons keep reminding me of it, saying ‘You don't understand!’”

One thing he is aware of is the number of people who have played dark elves carrying two scimitars in D&D games. “I'm certainly aware of how many Dungeon Masters hate my guts because of that,” he says jokingly.

With an outline already finalized for the second book in the new series, the fandom this character has inspired is only going to get stronger. Yet there's a whole cadre of characters that inhabit Salvatore's Forgotten Realms adventures and he's keen to give them all their moment in the spotlight.



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“Drizzt will be a big part of the books but I want to see what Artemis Entreri is up to, I want to see what Jarlaxle is doing. Of course Zaknafein has to be a big part of this, before I give Wulfgar and Regis their due finally. And I want to give Catti-brie a spotlight. So really I want to be able to branch out and go wider and follow my heart on stories that don't have to pertain directly to the overarching Realms storyline but will still be in tune with that.

“I want to set part of the second book in the past before Drizzt was born, with Jarlaxle and Zaknafein. That will keep me in the dark elf city without messing it up for Wizards! [Laughs] Because in one way it’s easier to write books when the characters are all created and the structures are all in place. But in another way having more of a blank canvas—what did Menzoberranzan look like 400 years ago?—allows me to go crazier and have a little more fun and do a little more damage. And I like that.”

As our call comes to an end—a proposed twenty-minute chat that almost stretches to an hour before we’re finished—we’re keen to understand what it means to create a character with a life-span of 30 years (and counting!). Is it a blessing, or a curse?

“It’s a blessing *and* a curse—but that’s ninety-nine percent blessing. The only curse is trying to get people to read my work that’s not Drizzt, which can be daunting sometimes. But because of Drizzt I’ve been let into so many other people’s lives. And they’ve found a friend, and that’s a blessing. I think most authors never get that.

“And it depends where I go but if I have a good-sized signing, I’ll usually have two or three people show up with a first-edition copy of *The Crystal Shard*. That’s crazy—it’s a thirty-year old book! But I signed four of them recently up in Emerald City and that blows my mind.”

READING TIMELINE

“I get a constant stream of PMs, emails and the like from people wondering where to go next with the Drizzt books,” Salvatore says. “I certainly understand this confusion; there are so many books now that I get confused all the time! So here it is, a complete list of my Forgotten Realms titles, as I would read them if I was just coming into the series. All caps titles are the trilogy/quartet/quintet title. Also, I might read the *Icwind Dale Trilogy* before *Dark Elf*—that is the unending debate!”

THE DARK ELF TRILOGY

Homeland*

Exile*

Sojourn*

THE ICEWIND DALE TRILOGY

The Crystal Shard*

Streams of Silver*

The Halfling's Gem*

THE STONE OF TYMORA

The Stowaway

The Shadowmask

The Sentinels

THE CLERIC QUINTET (featuring Cadderly and Pikel!)

Canticle

In Sylvan Shadows

Night Masks

The Fallen Fortress

The Chaos Curse

LEGACY OF THE DROW

The Legacy*

Starless Nights

Siege of Darkness

Passage to Dawn

PATHS OF DARKNESS

The Silent Blade

The Spine of the World

Sea of Swords

THE SELLSWORDS (featuring Artemis Entreri and Jarlaxle)

Servant of the Shard

Promise of the Witch-King

Road of the Patriarch

THE HUNTER'S BLADES

The Thousand Orcs

The Lone Drow

The Two Swords

TRANSITIONS

The Orc King

The Pirate King

The Ghost King

THE NEVERWINTER SAGA

Gauntlgrym

Neverwinter

Charon's Claw

The Last Threshold (“Speaking of confusion, *The Last Threshold* and *The Companions* run concurrently to each other. The immediate sequel to *The Companions* is *Night of the Hunter*.”)

THE SUNDERING

Book 1: The Companions

THE COMPANIONS CODEX

Night of the Hunter

Rise of the King

Vengeance of the Iron Dwarf

HOMECOMING

Archmage

Maestro

Hero

And finally...

The Collected Stories of the Legend of Drizzt (“All the short stories I’ve written for these characters over the years, for anthologies or *Dragon* magazine, including a new story that details the end of Wulfgar’s long life. And yes, **this is the one the celebrities did for Audible.com**—very cool.”)

* “These books are also available as graphic novels from IDW. There are also two original graphic novels: *Legend of Drizzt: Neverwinter Tales* fits in around *Neverwinter*, telling the surprising story of a certain fanged dwarf; while *Cutter* shows the (inadvertent) start of the War of Silver Marches, the story told in *The Companions Codex*.”

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The Legacy of Drizzt

Thirty years ago author R.A. Salvatore introduced the world to the dark elf Drizzt Do'Urden. And the world took notice...

There are plenty of casualties in R.A. Salvatore's Forgotten Realms books who can tell you the impact Drizzt had on them. "Devastating" is the word most would probably use, if they could still speak at this point. The dark elf has also made quite a mark on readers who have been devouring these tales for the past thirty years. We asked D&D luminaries what impact the character had on them when they first read *The Crystal Shard*...

The Crystal Shard

The most ringing endorsement you can get as a D&D writer is from the creator of the Forgotten Realms himself, Ed Greenwood. One of the first people to read *The Crystal Shard*, at the request of Mary Kirchoff and Jim Lowder, he was handed photocopies of the typed pages and asked to check the Realmslore.

“I was specifically asked if it was alright if Bob used certain characters, to make sure they weren’t being used for something else the Books Department folks didn’t know about. As I recall, Grimwald the wizard was ‘encumbered’ and I asked that he not be used; everything else was just fine by me,” Greenwood tells *Dragon+*.



Ed Greenwood (select to view)

“My initial reaction to the book? I loved it. I knew the writer was a *storyteller*, and I was in good hands. I sold the Realms to TSR largely so I could read new stories set there that I didn’t write and that could surprise me. This book delivered in spades! What stood out the most for me is that Bob captured the feel of the vast, cold, raw wilderness of the Sword Coast North. It ‘felt right’ to me, when I was reading it. As in: yes, this is my Realms, all right.”

Beyond Drizzt’s many appearances in D&D novels, he’s also been featured in the tabletop roleplaying game. In third edition, his stats could be found in the Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting (appearing as a Fighter 10/Barbarian 1/Ranger 5 of Mielikki). He was also featured as a character tile in the Legend of Drizzt Adventure System board game, as an NPC in Baldur’s Gate: Enhanced Edition, and even as a Magic: the Gathering card for an

older April Fool's article.

More recently, Chris Perkins created a version of Drizzt as a fifth edition fighter. We're pleased to offer a recreation of his character sheet for your use!

[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

“I liked how Icewind Dale was brought to life in the early novels,” agrees Chris Perkins, who first read *The Crystal Shard* a few years after joining Wizards of the Coast. “I remember it all feeling so cinematic.” “I was a teenager, so this blew my mind,” adds voice actor and DM Matt Mercer, who read the book in the summer of 1998. “For me, a lot of fantasy I had read beforehand had either taken a very careful approach to embracing the fantastical nature of the genre, or the world was very pristine and clean. This was a high-fantasy world that was both big and bold, with the presence of magic, cultures, and the classic evil-wizard-finds-artifact story. But it sustains that in a harsh land of danger and messy politics.



Chris Perkins (Select to view)

“I grew up a lover of fantasy, but the Icewind Dale setting further elevated my Tolkien-sparked love of the genre,” Mercer continues.

“It was my first experience with a snowy, unwelcoming region of fantasy world building, complete with barbaric hordes, unexpected alliances, and the first introduction of the classic character Drizzt.”

First impressions weren’t always about Drizzt, though. With such strong characters throughout, all the main personalities shone.

“My reaction was a sort of weird, nostalgic familiarity. It was the kind of story I could imagine players in my games having lived, if they were capable writers,” suggests author Bruce R Cordell, who used to stay on late in a quiet college genetics lab in 1988 so he wouldn’t be disturbed while reading. “But for me, the scene that stood out the most was where Bruenor crafted his hammer. It really brought what is often only a background game mechanic to ‘real’ life.”



Bruce R Cordell (Select to view)

“The development of Wulfgar stood out the most for me,” says Beamdog CEO Trent Oster, who read it in a university summer break sometime around 1990-1991. “From being an enemy to becoming almost a son to Bruenor, and from initial distrust of Drizzt to trusted student and later adventuring companion.”

“Bruenor’s forgiveness and rearing of Wulfgar also stood out for me,” adds author and former soldier Myke Cole. “Here’s a hardened enemy, dedicated to destroying him, and Bruenor forgave him, loved him and brought him up. When you spend your life in a field that applies violence to people, it’s a powerful reminder that victory in battle gives a chance for the ultimate reward: forgiveness. Granting clemency and seeing your foe change. Turning nemesis into alliance.”

Yet what really seems to have struck a chord with most readers are the battles. “I liked the choreography of the action scenes,” says Perkins. “The action sequences were really well described,” agrees

Wizards of the Coast's Ben Petrisor, who read *The Crystal Shard* for the first time around 2010. "I had an easy time visualizing those scenes, keeping track of the characters and the space they were in."

"I loved how the books felt so grounded in D&D as I played it," recalls Mike Mearls, who was introduced to them by a high school friend, and made his way through *The Crystal Shard* and *The Dark Elf* trilogies as quickly as he could get his hands on them. "The descriptions of Drizzt's battle against a mob of giants really captured my attention. The action felt like how I always envisioned D&D playing out, and it inspired me to become more descriptive in my own games."



(Select to view)

Inspiration

Having been impressed by a drow character making a life in Icewind Dale, in a D&D version of the 'fish out of water' tale, many readers and DMs were inspired to create their own version of Drizzt in-game. Perhaps it was the idea of playing, to quote Perkins, "the good guy who is generally loathed by the people he's trying to save." Or maybe it was the ability to wield two badass scimitars.

However, many of those we spoke to denied having put pencil to paper and writing the name Drizzt on a character sheet, for differing reasons.

"I haven't played a dark elf with two scimitars, though I have been thinking of playing a college of swords bard," says Petrisor, while Mearls adds: "No, but I do like playing drow. One of my favorite characters was a drow rogue plotting to gain the power needed to return to Menzoberranzan and assassinate the Matron Mother of her house."

“I did not play a version of Drizzt, actually! Partially because by the time I had learned about him and stepped into the D&D scene, the idea of wanting to make a character *just like* Drizzt was already prominent. Otherwise, I probably would have fallen into the same trap,” Mercer admits.



Matt Mercer (Select to view)

Some, obviously, have gotten a lot closer to playing the Underdark’s most famous denizen. “No... Though I have played a dark elf were-basilisk who wielded Mournblade. So, yeah,” says Cordell. While Greenwood doesn’t disappoint with his story: “I’ve never played a dark elf with two scimitars, but I have roleplayed Alustriel—as an NPC, I was the DM—at a charity game at Gen Con in the Milwaukee era, when she used magic to disguise herself as Drizzt and draw enemy attention away from the real Drizzt, so he could depart Silvermoon unnoticed, in another direction. The ruse worked!”

Others are more accepting about creating white-haired dark elf characters in their home games. “I may have created a character along those same lines,” says Oster, before Penny Arcade’s Mike

Fehlauer reveals his own dabbling: “I sought out *The Drow of the Underdark* sourcebook, and we ran an all-drow campaign from winter break to mid-summer. It was absolutely fantastic. What’s more, when I got into sword fighting in real life, my initial fighting style was two swords—and it was 100% because of Drizzt.”



Mike Fehlauer (Select to view)

If there’s one man who can’t deny taking up the mantle of Drizzt, it is DM to the stars Perkins. Having run an adventure for Acquisitions Incorporated where they met the legendary drow live on stage, he went on to play the character in games run by Patrick Rothfuss and Mike Krahulik. In preparation he got some all-important advice from the character’s creator.

“A few weeks before the live show, I asked R.A. Salvatore what Drizzt sounds like. He told me Drizzt acts and sounds like Jax Teller—played by Charlie Hunnam—from the FX series *Sons of Anarchy*, so I tried to imitate that. The experience was weirdly unpleasant. I tried playing him as smart and competent, but the whole time I was worried that bad dice rolls might turn him into a joke. R.A. Salvatore would’ve loved to play Drizzt on stage; next time I’ll let him do it!”



(Select to view)

Encounters

Having gained a fame that goes well beyond the paperback novels of his early days, the character of Drizzt has naturally popped up in many other settings over the past thirty years. Yet one encounter is ahead of all others when it comes to our D&D panel's favorite sighting of the character outside of the R.A Salvatore books.

“Seeing him in the *Baldur's Gate* video game was particularly fun,” says Petrisor. “When you come across him, he's surrounded by gnolls and you can help him or just watch as he dispatches them himself. It's a cool cameo and establishes how capable he is, and also serves as aspiration for the low-level player and their party. The best part though, as it is an open game, is that you can try to take out Drizzt yourself. He's really powerful, but determined players can do it and take his scimitars for themselves.” “I don't feel so bad trying to kill him there after hearing that Bob Salvatore tried doing that himself,” adds Mearls.



Mike Mearls (Select to view)

“Having read through the *Icwind Dale Trilogy*, I had a *huge* fanboy moment when he showed up—voiced by Cam Clarke, no less,” adds Mercer, who used Imoen’s pickpocket skill in *Baldur’s Gate* to pilfer Twinkle, Icingdeath, and Drizzt’s +4 mithral chainmail. “I took those and tore through the rest of the game with my majestic set of equipment... until the expansion, where a *very* angry Drizzt waylaid my party to retrieve the objects I’d stolen. My mind was *once again* blown.”

If you’re thinking there’s no way that digital encounter can be bested when it comes to seeing Drizzt in the wild, you don’t know Ed Greenwood. His tale takes place in the real world, and probably should come with its own mic-drop gif.

“My favorite encounter with Drizzt was long ago at a gaming table, with Bob roleplaying him, and the two of us grinning at each other and just having *fun*,” he says.

Legacy Of Drizzt

Whether you’ve read R.A Salvatore’s fantastic series of books, met a video game sprite battling gnolls, played a drow with two scimitars—or not!—the chances are you know who Drizzt is at the very least. He

has become a touchstone character of fantasy, like Gandalf, Conan, and King Arthur, with a rich legacy that stretches far beyond the written word.

For Cole, Drizzt helped solidify the notion of the ranger as something more than a green clad, bow-carrying woodsman. “He unseated the travel-stained icon of Aragorn of Arathorn, and modernized our perception of what it could mean to live in the wilds of the Forgotten Realms,” he says. “Drizzt also set the standard for conflict and flawed-nature in a D&D protagonist and upped the game when it came to storytelling for generations of DMs.”



Myke Cole (Select to view)

Mearls, meanwhile, believes that Drizzt and his companions embody a lot of the elements that make D&D stories unique: “They’re outsiders who have banded together to face the world as one, a story common in many D&D campaigns.”

Yet it’s the personal choices Drizzt makes, which are woven into the very fabric of the character, that seem to speak to the majority of the readership.

“Drizzt is a lawful good drow. He’s D&D’s most famous iconoclast. Folks like him because he’s not a typical drow. He escaped from a place of pure evil to carve out a new life for himself, protecting

people who fear and despise him,” says Perkins.

“Drizzt’s legacy is one of isolation and hardships resulting from a strong internal moral conflict. He realizes the wrongness of the world he is part of and commits to escape it and embrace his moral code at great personal cost. He is a powerful, yet vulnerable character and his loyalty is inspiring,” adds Oster.

“Drizzt is an important example of a heroic character who is not defined by the boundaries of their ancestry or expected capability. To me, he shows players of D&D that just because one of the books says *most* dark elves are evil, not every one is,” says Mercer. “He teaches players to think outside of the pre-generated box of fantasy tropes and invites you to defy what has come before, to not be beholden to what the lore says and find a way to subvert it. To me, Drizzt is permission to tell your character’s story however you like, and the world will adjust around you.”



Trent Oster (Select to view)

“Drizzt helped show a lot of readers and players that any character from any background can be a hero,” says Petrisor, summing up his greatest achievement succinctly.

Anyone can be a hero. There’s nothing more D&D than that.

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and changed its course, it always runs under the Stone Bridge at exactly the same point. The dwarves say the Stone Bridge has survived thousands of years of earthquakes, floods, and battles because it is sacred to Moradin.

REGIONAL HISTORY

The story of the Sword Coast North is the story of the vanishing of old, nonhuman realms and the establishment of Waterdeep and the Northlander cities. (Waterdeep's story is discussed in detail in the next entry.) The first great realm to rise in this part of the world was Illefarn, a kingdom of elves and dwarves that existed thousands of years ago. The first dungeons under Mount Waterdeep were delved by these folk.

Illefarn was a contemporary of Netheril and survived its fall, lasting until its elven rulers abandoned Faerûn for Evermeet a few hundred years before the beginning of Dalereckoning. After the fall of the great realms, humans migrated into these lands and built freeholds, towns, and keeps along the river valleys and at the harbors. The first Northlander longships arrived in the region during the last centuries of the Illefarn empire. The Northlanders colonized the island of Ruathym and spread to all the islands in the northern seas. Others migrated north, past the Spine of the World, and became the founders of Icewind Dale.

In the wake of Eaclann's fall in the 9th century DR, elves, dwarves, Northlanders, and Netherese descendants from Ascalhorn formed Phalorm, the Realm of Three Crowns, which attempted to mirror the accomplishments of Myth Drannor to the east. It lasted only a century before orc hordes swept it away. Its successor, the Kingdom of Man, had an even briefer existence. Civilization lost its grip on these lands until Waterdeep grew strong enough to drive the orcs back to the Spine of the World. The city of Luskan was founded on the wreckage of the orc realm of Illuskan, and the towns of the Dessarin valley—Tribobar, Longsaddle, Secomber, and others—were settled.

With prosperity and civilization come new threats. No orc horde can sweep away the well-established cities of this region, but powerful forces conspire to rule this land in other ways.

PLOTS AND RUMORS

Luskan's Arcane Brotherhood grows more and more aggressive each year, overtly threatening Mirabar and Neverwinter. Ten years ago the Lords' Alliance threatened war to avert Luskan's conquest of Ruathym, but few of the leaders in this area wish to embark on a bloody and expensive crusade on behalf of the pirate chiefs of Ruathym.

Fire Rescue: Something is killing the fire elementals that live beneath Mount Hotenow in Neverwinter Wood. Ordinarily, humans and elves don't care about the life and death of outsiders from the Elemental Plane of Fire, but Neverwinter relies on the supernatural warmth that flows out of the Neverwinter River as it bubbles up through the fire elementals' home beneath Mount Hotenow. If the fire elementals all leave, the river will freeze over, and winter will finally come to Neverwinter.

The Kraken's Tentacles: Semmonemily (NE doppelganger Sor12) is busily subverting the city of Yartar by uniting two disparate organizations—the Hands of Yartar, the city's fractious thieves' guild, and a powerful wererat clan lead by Nalynaul the Shriveled, a cunning illithid. Semmonemily plots to murder the Waterbaron Bellethe Kheldorna and assume her place, making the Hands the secret rulers of the town while the Kraken Society rules the Hands.

DRIZZT DO'URDEN

Male drow Ftr10/Bbn1/Rgr5 of Mielikki: CR 18; Medium-size humanoid (elf); HD 10d10+20 plus 1d12+2 plus 5d10+10; hp 124; Init +9; Spd 40 ft.; AC 23 (touch 14, flat-footed 19); Atk +17/+12/+7/+2 melee (1d6+6 plus 1d6 cold/18–20, +3 *frost scimitar*), +16/+11 melee (1d6+4/18–20, +2 *defending scimitar*); SQ Drow traits, favored enemy (goblins +2, magical beasts +1), light blindness, rage, spell-like abilities; SR 27; AL CG; SV Fort +15, Ref +9, Will +7; Str 13, Dex 20, Con 15, Int 17, Wis 17, Cha 14. Height 5 ft. 4 in.

Skills and Feats: Climb +8, Handle Animal +9, Hide +13, Intuit Direction +5, Jump +8, Knowledge (nature) +5, Listen +20, Move Silently +15, Ride (horse) +7, Search +13, Spot +15, Use Rope +7, Wilderness Lore +8; Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Mobility, Quick Draw, Track, Twin Sword Style, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialization (scimitar).

Special Qualities: Drow Traits (Ex): +2 racial bonus on Will saves against spells and spell-like abilities, darkvision 120 ft. Light

Blindness (Ex): Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds drow

for 1 round. In addition, they suffer a –1 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light. **Rage (Ex):** During his rage, Drizzt has the following statistics instead of those given above: hp 156; AC 21 (touch 12, flat-footed 17); Atk +19/+14/+9/+4 melee (1d6+8 plus 1d6 cold/18–20, +3 *frost brand scimitar*) and +18/+13 melee (1d6+5/18–20, +2 *defender scimitar*); SV Fort +17, Will +9; Str 17, Con 19. Skills: Climb +10, Jump +10. The rage lasts 7 rounds, after which Drizzt is fatigued. He can rage once per day. Spell-like Abilities: 1/day—*dancing lights*, *darkness*, *faerie fire*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a 16th-level sorcerer.

Spells Prepared (1; base DC = 14): 1—*detect animals or plants*.

Possessions: +4 *mithral chainmail*, *Icingdeath* (+3 *frost scimitar*), *Twinkle* (+2 *defending scimitar*), *figurine of wondrous power: onyx panther* (name Guenhwyvar; see below)

Onyx Panther: This magical figurine summons the black panther Guenhwyvar, a friend and loyal companion to Drizzt. She can be summoned every other day for a period of 6 hours. If slain, she reverts to her figurine form and cannot be summoned for 48 hours. Guen understands Common and Undercommon, and has the following statistics:



Drizzt Do'Urdan

Guenhwyvar: Female panther; CR 5; Medium-size animal; HD 6d8+12; hp 39; Init +4; Spd 40 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 15 (touch 14, flat-footed 11); Atk +8 melee (1d6+3, bite), +6 melee (1d3+1, 2 claws); SA Pounce, improved grab, rake 1d3+1; SQ Low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +9, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Balance +12, Climb +11, Hide +9*, Listen +6, Move Silently +12, Spot +6; Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (bite), Weapon Finesse (claw). Includes +4 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks, +8 racial bonus on Balance checks. *In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, her Hide bonus improves to +8.

Despite his increasing fame (or infamy) across the Sword Coast North as a drow who dwells on the surface, is deadly in battle, fights with great agility and two magic scimitars, and can call on an *onyx panther figurine of wondrous power* to bring a battle-companion to his side, Drizzt Do'Urden remains an enigma.

He worships Mielikki and makes war on the cruel city of his birth (Menzoberranzan), his fellow drow, and all who serve Lolth. He counts as friends human warriors of the North (Wulfgar and Cattie-brie) and the dwarf Bruenor Battlehammer (whom he helped to regain the rulership of Mithral Hall). He has slain dragons and drow matron mothers. He defied fiends (Errtu) and powers (Lolth), battled perhaps the most deadly assassin currently active in Faerûn (Artemis Entreri), and sought to forge his own life on the surface.

Thoughtful and sensitive to others, Drizzt holds himself to the highest ideals but does not expect the same of others. Ever alert for treachery and danger, he speaks little but is apt to be polite (if terse) in his dealings. A perfectionist who yearns to be accepted into places and groups and to make friends widely, Drizzt is haunted by the danger he brings to those he befriends thanks to the scrutiny of Lolth and his other foes (notably Errtu and Entreri). Those he meets see his manner as grim.

Early in his surface travels, Alustriel welcomed him as warmly and personally as she does all in need, but dared not let him openly into Silvermoon at that time. His deeds have, very slowly, made Drizzt Do'Urden more welcome in the Sword Coast North.

waterdeep

Population: 1,347,840 (humans 64%, dwarves 10%, elves 10%, halflings 5%, half-elves 5%, gnomes 3%, half-orcs 2%) (City of Waterdeep, Metropolis, 132,661)

Government: Oligarchy (the Lords of Waterdeep, anonymous meritocratic rulers)

Religions: All, especially Deneir, Mystra, and Oghma

Imports: Grain, livestock, leather, ore, timber, and exotic goods from all lands

Exports: Ale, arms, cloth, furnishings, leather goods, pottery, refined metals, and all other sorts of finished goods

Alignment: All

Waterdeep is the major cosmopolitan power of Faerûn. It benefits from an excellent harbor, wise rule, a tolerant spirit, and a powerful magical tradition that generally produces stronger good wizards than evil wizards. Waterdeep contains at least one of nearly everything, but it's not a melting pot—instead, it's like a gem grinder, smoothing individuals' rough edges so that their talents shine brighter.



The city's nickname, the City of Splendors, is never said sarcastically. People know that Waterdeep is a marvel and that life is better, or at least more bizarre, there. If Waterdhavians have one notable fault, it's a tendency to think that there is nothing new under the sun, and they treat the entire sum of human and nonhuman experience as their potential cultural heritage. This fault is not always a bad thing.

LIFE AND SOCIETY

The City of Splendors is undeniably a place where things happen, an important center of trade and change. Waterdhavians merely accept this as a fact and never think on why or how it became so. The astute see that Waterdeep is a city of wealth where the rich gather to trade, and in trading with others generate wealth with a swiftness unknown in backcountry Faerûn. The coins are the fire under the cauldron.

The cauldron itself, and the spoons that stir it, are the local powers locked in an endless struggle for supremacy, striving against each other in ways large and small. These are the guilds, nobles, trading costers, mercenary bands, city authorities, criminal organizations, individual citizens seeking daily sustenance, and newcomers seeking fortunes.

Some folk find life in Waterdeep to be a wine they can't stop drinking. Powers of all sorts, from cults and trade cabals to wizards' organizations and foreign rulers, find it expedient to have spies and even assassins active in Waterdeep at all times. Although the City of Splendors has plenty of room for anyone with coin to spend, it is also the place where every private moment may be seen or overheard by someone else. Many Waterdhavians rent secret rooms or establish false identities to avoid their enemies' ears.

MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS

Without some attention to the organizations that hold Waterdeep together, discussion of its various geographical features and landmarks misses the forest for all the trees.

City Watch: One of two armed bodies maintained by the city from Castle Waterdeep, the Watch functions as a police force. Watchfolk dress in green, black, and gold uniforms. They are well trained and well equipped with leather armor, clubs, and short swords. They would rather talk problems over than use force of arms, but if fighting is required, they use horns to summon reinforcements.

City Guard: Like the City Watch, the Guard is headquartered in Castle Waterdeep. Unlike the Watch, the Guard is made up of professional soldiers responsible for defending the city, protecting the gates, and guarding important citizens and locations. Guards wear scale or chain shirts and carry short swords and shortbows.

Guilds: Once upon a time, the merchants' and craftsfolks' guilds ruled the city. Waterdeep barely survived the strife. These days, the guilds focus on the commercial and professional enterprises they handle best and (usually) leave the politicking to the Lords. Waterdeep's thieves' guild, the Xanathar's Guild, has been driven into Skullport, far beneath the city.

Lords' Alliance: The Lords of Waterdeep oversee a council composed of themselves and the lords of other merchant powers of the Sword Coast, as well as those inland cities whose interests closely match Waterdeep's.

Lords of Waterdeep: A council of sixteen members who keep their identities secret rules Waterdeep. The Lords appear in public only when masked and magically protected from divinations and other forms of magic. Piergeiron the Paladinson (LG male human Pal15 of Tyr), Warden of Waterdeep and Commander of the Watch, is the only Open Lord (unmasked), and his palace in the

D&D BEYOND

CHARACTER NAME

CLASS & LEVEL

BACKGROUND

PLAYER NAME

RACE

ALIGNMENT

EXPERIENCE POINTS

STRENGTH

DEXTERITY

CONSTITUTION

INTELLIGENCE

WISDOM

CHARISMA

INSPIRATION

PROFICIENCY BONUS

- ☐ ___ Strength
- ☐ ___ Dexterity
- ☐ ___ Constitution
- ☐ ___ Intelligence
- ☐ ___ Wisdom
- ☐ ___ Charisma

SAVING THROWS

- ☐ ___ Acrobatics (Dex)
- ☐ ___ Animal Handling (Wis)
- ☐ ___ Arcana (Int)
- ☐ ___ Athletics (Str)
- ☐ ___ Deception (Cha)
- ☐ ___ History (Int)
- ☐ ___ Insight (Wis)
- ☐ ___ Intimidation (Cha)
- ☐ ___ Investigation (Int)
- ☐ ___ Medicine (Wis)
- ☐ ___ Nature (Int)
- ☐ ___ Perception (Wis)
- ☐ ___ Performance (Cha)
- ☐ ___ Persuasion (Cha)
- ☐ ___ Religion (Int)
- ☐ ___ Sleight of Hand (Dex)
- ☐ ___ Stealth (Dex)
- ☐ ___ Survival (Wis)

SKILLS

ARMOR CLASS

INITIATIVE

SPEED

Hit Point Maximum

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total

HIT DICE

SUCCESSES

FAILURES

DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME

ATK BONUS

DAMAGE/TYPE

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

EQUIPMENT

FEATURES & TRAITS



AGE	HEIGHT	WEIGHT
EYES	SKIN	HAIR

CHARACTER NAME

CHARACTER APPEARANCE

ALLIES & ORGANIZATIONS

NAME

SYMBOL

CHARACTER BACKSTORY

ADDITIONAL FEATURES & TRAITS

TREASURE

D&D BEYOND

SPELLCASTING
CLASS

SPELLCASTING
ABILITY

SPELL SAVE DC

SPELL ATTACK
BONUS

0

CANTRIPS

3

6

SPELL
LEVEL

SLOTS TOTAL

SLOTS EXPENDED

1

PREPARED

SPELL NAME

4

7

8

2

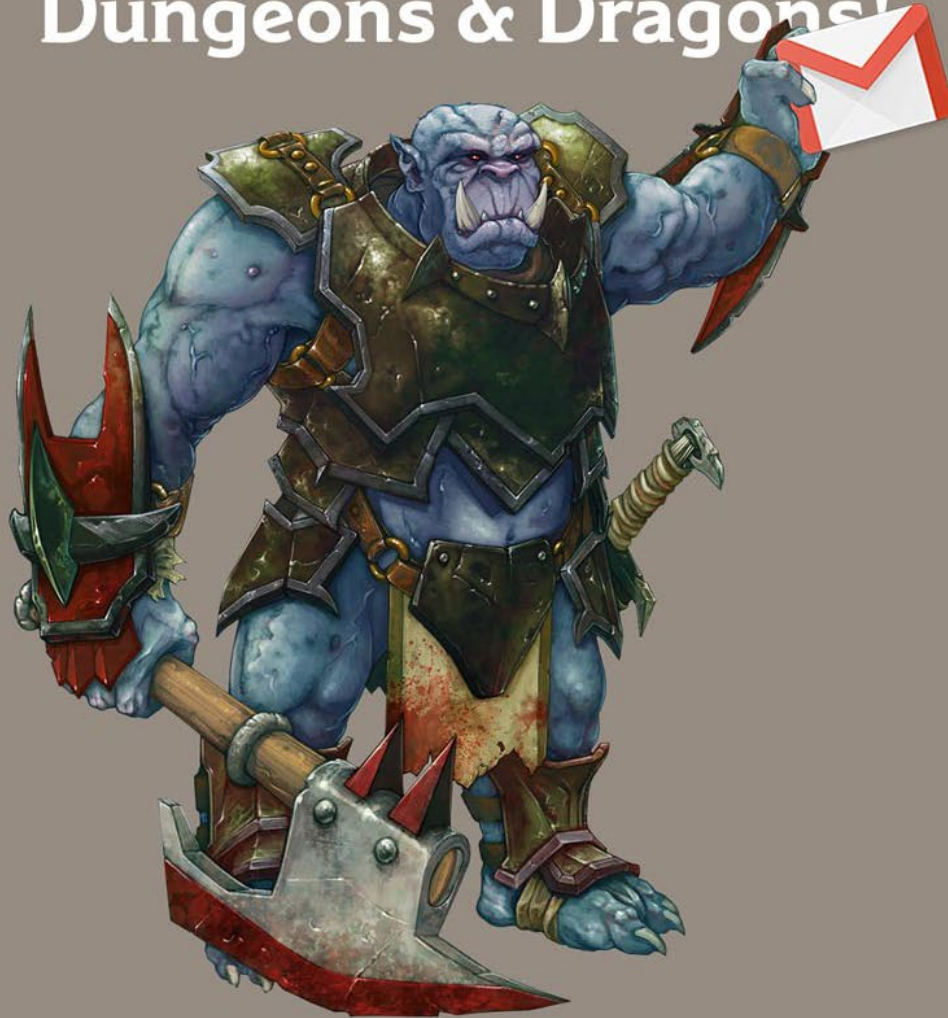
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SPELLS KNOWN

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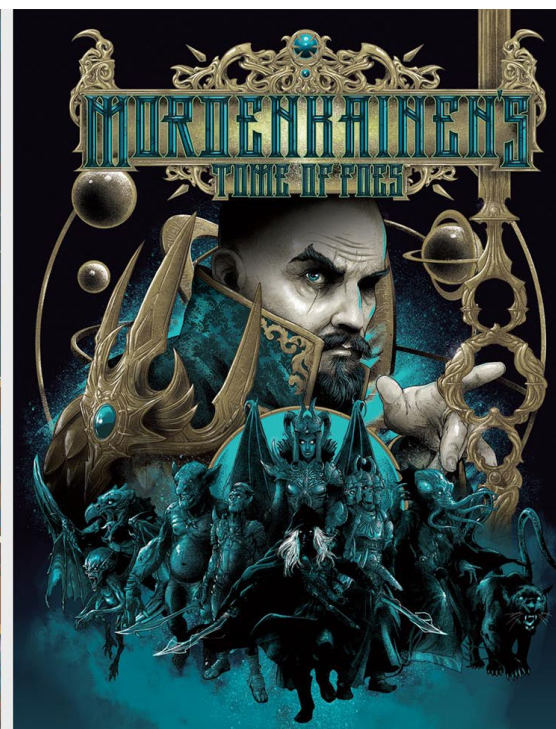
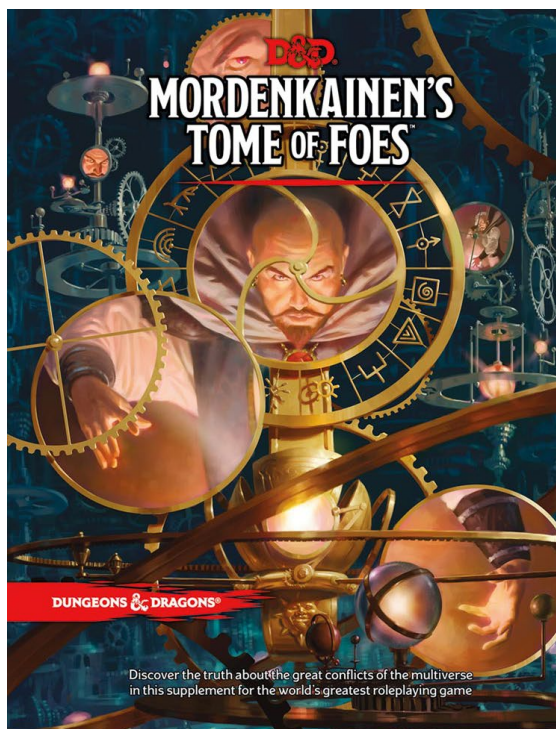
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Mordenkainen's Mayhem

Our second preview for Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes explores the conflicts of the multiverse!

Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes releases May 29, 2018 (with the limited alt-cover version hitting game stores slightly earlier on May 18)—in which, you'll discover the truth about the great conflicts of the D&D multiverse. To help preview the book, the D&D Team has been hosting its latest D&D Creature Competition—Mordenkainen's Mayhem!



(Select to view)

In years past, we've hosted a bracket series of polls. Those creatures earning the most votes (whether based on presumed combat prowess, design considerations and/or sheer popularity) moved on. This time, we decided to do things a little differently...

In **Mordenkainen's Mayhem**, we're staging actual battles around the table to see which creatures advance. Members of the D&D team have already drafted eight roughly challenge rating-balanced creatures from the pages of *Mordenkainen's*, fighting each week in a tabletop arena until an ultimate champion is crowned!

Watch the final livestream matches Mondays at 4-5PM PT, on [twitch.tv/dnd](https://www.twitch.tv/dnd). Then tune in for the grand finale, currently scheduled to take place April 30.

PREVIEW: BLOOD WARS



(Select to view)

Mordenkainen's Mayhem started off with no less fearsome competitors than demons versus devils. As described in *Tome of Foes*: “Throughout history, the teeming hordes of the Abyss and the strictly regimented legions of the Nine Hells have battled for supremacy in the cosmos. In the mortal world, the scant few scholars, arcanists, and adventurers who know the conflict for what it is refer to it as the Blood War.”

Emi Tanji drafted the demon Sibriex, while Adam Lee drafted the devil Moloch.

In order to help balance things out, both competitors lost their Legendary Actions. Moloch, a bit stronger (CR 21 compared to the Sibriex's CR 18), further lost his Legendary Resistance. The Sibriex was also given maximum Hit Points as well as a handful of Sorrowsworn Wretched (in part, because Emi enjoyed their art so much).



(Select to view)

As a special preview in this issue, we're pleased to offer Moloch as he appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. And as Mike Mearls confirmed in a recent *Dragon+* livestream, the famed statue depicted on the first edition *Player's Handbook* cover does indeed depict this very devil!



(Select to view)

Again, from *Mordenkainen's*:

“Long ago, Moloch earned his place among the other archdevils through the glory he won driving demons out of the Nine Hells. Asmodeus rewarded him by elevating Moloch to the rulership of Malbolge. Now, Moloch has been rendered nearly powerless after his last failure. He endlessly schemes of ways to return to his former status. Rumors suggest that he can often be found in Sigil,

where he bargains with yugoloths to build yet another army with which he might invade Malbolge and wrest back his throne.”

[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

PAST CREATURE COMPETITIONS

Curious about our past D&D Creature Competitions? Let's take a quick look back at some former winners...

2005: Head-to-Head

Our very first competition, the brainchild of web developer Mark Jindra: “Dungeons & Dragons has introduced a vast collection of creatures to the game. Whether it's the iconic dragons, beholders, or mind flayers—or some of the even more unusual templates—everyone has their favorite. So what happens when sixteen of these creatures go head-to-head? Plenty of carnage, obviously...”

WINNER: Folks from around Wizards of the Coast nominated these

first contestants, with Eludecia the Succubus Paladin ultimately winning. Described as a redeemed villain who rides an armored vrock warmount into battle, a 3.5 adventure scenario making use of Eludecia as well as the full set of competitors can still be found on the [DMs Guild](#).

This is also the competition that reintroduced Meepo, the measly kobold dragonkeeper from *The Sunless Citadel* (see *Tales from the Yawning Portal* page 16). Nominated by Mat Smith, Meepo lost to Eludecia, but ended up defeating no less than the tarrasque in the consolation bracket. He later parlayed this success into appearances in the d20 Modern and D&D Miniatures lines.

2006: Battle Royal

For this competition, we went to the D&D community for their nominations. As for the rules: "...we'll start with eight creatures in the proverbial gladiator pit, and ask you to vote for your favorite. Each week thereafter, the bottom vote-getter leaves—and, so long as any remain, a new creature will enter to take its place. Every week we'll present the next vote, until it all boils down to your final winner!"

WINNER: Taibo, the Ethereal Filcher Monk. Nominated by Slagger the Chuul and [later statted up by Chris Lindsay](#): "Normally a spectacular pickpocket, this filcher has instead taken on an ascetic lifestyle; it's secluded lair now serves as its place of meditation. Plus, four fists of fury and the ability to duck in and out of the Ethereal Plane make for one tough melee artist."

2006: Dragons

We loved these competitions enough to run a second bracket in 2006, dedicated to D&D's Year of Dragons. And for competitors, we polled players once again based on various draconic categories (chromatic, metallic, strange...).

WINNER: Caululithrax, the Vampiric Shadow Dragon Lifedrinker. Nominated by Helian: "Caululithrax began skulking about the shadows of the vast subterranean caverns, and for countless years was enemy to many a drow, duergar and even illithid's treasure vaults. Tired and gravely wounded after a fateful illithid ambush, Caululithrax was soon to suffer a cruel and unexpected twist of fate—he stumbled upon the lair of an elder vampire. Greatly angered by

his unexpected entry, and sensing Caululithrax's weakness, the vampire attacked..."

2015: Elemental Evil

In support of the *Princes of the Apocalypse* campaign, we put forward a slate of elemental-themed creatures. Each creature further related to one of the four elemental cults vying for control over the Realms; and to help balance them out, we employed no small measure of shenanigans—such as who wins a fight between 99 kobolds armed only with rope, and a chimera whose dragon head cannot stop breathing fire to the extreme annoyance and detriment of the other heads?

WINNER: Ultimate Flesh Golem. A creature whose body was crafted from the corpse of a dead god. What god? And who crafted the golem? Those secrets were never revealed—but the concept still seems enticing enough!

BACK TO TOP



MOLOCH

Exiled from the Nine Hells, Moloch would do anything to reclaim his position. Long ago, Moloch earned his place among the other archdevils through the glory he won driving demons out of the Nine Hells. Asmodeus rewarded him by elevating Moloch to the rulership of Malbolge.

For eons, Moloch ruled his domain, vying against the other archdevils as he sought still greater power. This animosity worked in Asmodeus's favor, since Asmodeus knew that Moloch's scheming helped keep the other archdevils in check. The arrangement began to unravel, however, when Moloch took the night hag named Malagard for his advisor. Her words were poison, and gradually she convinced Moloch to direct his efforts to topple Asmodeus. Although the conspiracy nearly succeeded, it was thwarted. Moloch was stripped of his station and sentenced to death—and only the timely use of a planar portal allowed him to escape.

Moloch wasted no time in preparing for his return. He amassed an army of devils and monsters and left them to make final preparations for invading the Nine Hells, while he ventured to a distant Material Plane in the hope of finding an artifact that would ensure his success. While there, he became trapped, leaving his

armies at the mercy of his enemies. In short order they were destroyed.

Now, Moloch has been rendered nearly powerless after his last failure. He endlessly schemes of ways to return to his former status, but every time he enters the Nine Hells, he is demoted to an imp and can't regain his normal powers until he leaves. Thus, he lives a split existence, sometimes scheming in Malbolge or other layers of the Hells and at other times wandering the planes searching for magical might or secrets that might help him win back his title.

Rumors suggest that he can often be found in Sigil, where he bargains with yugoloths to build yet another army with which he might invade Malbolge and wrest the throne from Glasya. Bereft as he is, he has little to offer in exchange, so he might bargain with mortals to gain their aid in acquiring coin, jewels, and other riches in return for knowledge about the Nine Hells and the other planes.

Most of Moloch's cultists have switched allegiance to one of the other archdevils, but idols constructed to honor him still stand in deep dungeons, their jeweled eyes and the remnants of power they hold drawing monstrous worshipers and unwise adventurers into places where his foul influence remains.

MOLOCH

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 253 (22d10 + 132)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	19 (+4)	22 (+6)	21 (+5)	18 (+4)	23 (+6)

Saving Throws Dex +11, Con +13, Wis +11, Cha +13

Skills Deception +13, Intimidation +13, Perception +11

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Moloch's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 21). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *alter self* (can become Medium when changing his appearance), *animate dead*, *burning hands* (as a 7th-level spell), *confusion*, *detect magic*, *fly*, *geas*, *major image*, *stinking cloud*, *suggestion*, *wall of fire*

1/day each: *flame strike*, *symbol* (stunning only)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Moloch fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Moloch has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Moloch's weapon attacks are magical.

Regeneration. Moloch regains 20 hit points at the start of his turn. If he takes radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn. Moloch dies only if he starts his turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Moloch makes three attacks: one with his bite, one with his claw, and one with his whip.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d8 + 8) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) slashing damage.

Many-Tailed Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d4 + 8) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) lightning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 24 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 30 feet in a straight line toward Moloch.

Breath of Despair (Recharge 5–6). Moloch exhales in a 30-foot cube. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or take 27 (5d10) psychic damage, drop whatever it is holding, and become frightened for 1 minute. While frightened in this way, a creature must take the Dash action and move away from Moloch by the safest available route on each of its turns, unless there is nowhere to move, in which case it needn't take the Dash action. If the creature ends its turn in a location where it doesn't have line of sight to Moloch, the creature can repeat the saving throw. On a success, the effect ends.

Teleport. Moloch magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing and carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Moloch can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Moloch regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Stinking Cloud. Moloch casts *stinking cloud*.

Teleport. Moloch uses his Teleport action.

Whip. Moloch makes one attack with his whip.

Moloch obsesses over power he lost rather than thinking of the power he could gain elsewhere in the planes.

What a pity he so wastes his potential.





Fiction: Qawasha and Kupalué Part 3

As we continue our travel through the jungles of Chult, we conclude our journey with two of its stranger guides...

Adam Lee

Qawasha picked an unseen path for the rest of the party through the dim light of the early morning, guided by a few thin shafts of sunlight that made their way through the thick canopy. As they

approached the foot of the last hill before Mezro, Qawasha had the party take a break by a small stream flowing through a grove of wazingo trees. They cleared off a few stones to set their packs on, and enjoyed the sensation of the cool breeze on their backs. Samrith took off her boots and soaked her feet in the clear stream while Zara gnawed on a piece of hardtack. Qawasha wandered off to collect some wazingo nuts from the trees, as they would provide a magical light when shaken.

When he came back from his successful foray, he saw Zara frozen in place, her hand reaching out with the slow, smoothness of a snake for her sword. She noticed Qawasha's return and with a nod of her head, drew his attention to two small creatures that looked at them from atop a moss-covered stone, gently illuminated by the dappled light of the sun. They were tiny creatures, only slightly taller than a human hand, their small, mask-like heads tilted with apparent curiosity at them. One was perched on the rock about fifteen feet away, squatting on its spindly haunches, while the other stood behind its companion. As Qawasha looked at them, the taller one reached out its tiny, spider-like hand and slowly clutched the thin stem of a nearby leaf which it pulled in front of itself so as to peer over the top.

Qawasha looked at Zara and smiled. "No need for a sword," he whispered. "They're chwingas."

"Ch-what?"

"Chwingas. They are gentle beings."

Qawasha could see Zara relax as she tried to process exactly what she was seeing. She looked at the strange little beings, and unconsciously made a series of faces while pulling at her bottom lip.

"So, these are chwingas, huh?" Zara said as she shook her head. "They're rather...strange."

Qawasha smiled and said. "You have no idea."

Zara reached out and shook Samrith, who had sprawled out for a nap by the stream. Samrith awoke with a snort.

"Shhh. Look." Zara pointed.

Samrith blinked, furrowed her brow and squinted her eyes a bit. Then she saw the tiny beings and her face softened into wonder.

“They’re chwingas.” Zara said, answering the unvoiced question in Samrith’s head as they both stared at them.

“They’re... unbelievable. Look at how tiny—aaah, it’s moving!”

The chwinga moved toward Samrith. Its mask-like face rotated and swiveled as it crept toward her on all fours using careful and deliberate steps.

“Qawasha?” Zara looked over with some concern.

Qawasha had been watching all of this with some fascination of his own. Although he had encountered chwingas on his excursions into the jungle and had received many strange and magical trinkets from them, he had never known them to come around when he was with other people. Qawasha knew that the chwingas were gentle and connected to the forest, but beyond that, they were a mystery to him. Growing up, he had heard stories and theories about the chwingas, about how they were harmless spirits that brought good luck or how they were guardians of the jungle that were once spirits of the ancestors; but after spending many nights in silence surrounded by them, observing their odd and often comical behavior, all Qawasha knew was that the chwingas were inquisitive, playful, magical and mysterious...but beyond that was anyone’s guess. Every time Qawasha thought he understood them, the chwingas would always surprise him with something new.

And as this chwinga moved toward Samrith, Qawasha thought, here was another surprise.

“It’s fine. They must trust you. I have never traveled with someone who they would approach,” he said to them both.

Samrith looked from Qawasha back to the chwinga who had stopped within five feet of where she sat. The chwinga looked at her, its black and white mask-face framed by wild hair that sprayed out around it. It held out its arms and stood still, as if asking for something. Then it sat down on the floor with a tiny thud and bowed its head.

“I wonder what it wants.” Zara said.

“What do they like?” Samrith asked.

“They like everything,” Qawasha said. “Berries, stones, beads, leaves.”

“Are they wearing masks?” Samrith said as she looked at the chwinga’s head, its little face looked like it had been painted on by some master designer. “Do you want some food, little friend?”

“Those masks are their heads, and I don’t think they eat food,” Qawasha said. “They seem to enjoy giving and receiving any kind of gift.”

“Well, let’s see what we have.” Samrith leaned back to find her pack. After rummaging through it, she took out a little box, and from this a tiny, ornate shell the color of coral. “I got this from the Moonshaes.” She turned to the chwinga. “Let’s see what you think of it.”

As soon as it saw the shell, the chwinga hopped up to its feet and held out its tiny hands. Samrith slowly crouched down and held out the shell. “Here you go little friend.”

The chwinga took the shell with great care, its spindly fingers touching the smooth, spiral surface with curiosity. This seemed to perk up the other chwinga who had, up to this point, been watching from behind the leaf. As if in response to the gift, it got down from its perch on the mossy stone, walked over and stood before Samrith. It made a quick series of gestures and within a matter of a few seconds, a small mushroom pushed its way through the dark litter of the jungle floor and sprouted before their eyes. The cap of the mushroom swelled and flattened out, then hardened into a disk with simple and beautiful geometric design on it. The chwinga plucked the cap off the stem with some effort and offered it to Samrith who, after looking at Qawasha and Zara with delight, took it with curiosity and reverence.

“It’s a magical charm,” Qawasha said. “They don’t often do that.”

“A charm?” Samrith said. She turned the charm about the size of a large coin in her hand and examined its strange design. “What does it do?”

“They are all different. A wizard in Nyanzaru could tell you, but I let the forest tell me when to use the magic of the charm. I think chwingas see something within us that often we do not, and when the time is right the purpose of the charm is revealed.”

Samrith knelt before the little creatures. “Thanks, little fellas.”

The chwingas looked at everyone in the party, and then, as if satisfied, nodded at each other, turned about and began to clamber over stones and vines, holding hands as they made their way back into the jungle.





As they neared Mezro, the trees, plant-life and even the very air changed. Qawasha could smell the salt in the air as they began their descent, picking their way down toward the Olung River Valley and the ruined city. It wasn't long before the jungle began to thin, with stone walls and remnants of buildings emerging from amid the tangle of vines and moss-covered earth. As they moved closer, the constant chatter and buzz of the animals and insects of the jungle had become eerily silent, and not a bird was to be seen.

“Where are all the animals?” Samrith asked.

“The Spellplague,” Qawasha answered. “Its magic still lingers here. The animals know that it is not a place for the living. Best be on guard.”

Zara nodded and drew her sword.

It didn't take them long before they finally broke through the last of the trees to behold the ruins of Mezro. As they stood on the small rise, surveying its crumbling walls, Qawasha could see the faces of his companions as they took in the sight. The once great docks and wide avenues were now reclaimed by the Olung River to such a degree that one could almost explore the city by boat. Vines and trees were growing in, on and around buildings that were in various states of collapse, but even with the advanced destruction that the Spellplague had wrought, one could imagine the city in its prime and still feel the unique presence that it once was.

Samrith pointed to the central plaza, now sunken and flooded with water, where the two major avenues that divided the city east to west and north to south, crossed. “Was that where the crystal temple would have been?”

“Yes,” Qawasha said from within a mix of emotions that flowed through him as his eyes took in the wreckage of the once sacred city. He was filled with sorrow, for the loss of an access to something greater: the Maze—a chance to use a device fashioned by a god to navigate and integrate the confusion and chaos within the mortal mind and soul, and set straight once and for all everything that was

obscured, twisted and crooked within oneself. To walk the maze and come to that place of reckoning, and then enter the purifying light of the crystal temple... all that was lost because of the stupidity of men. This led to anger, at those who had squandered such a gift, who had taken the possibility from him and all those who earnestly yearned for clarity. To lose the irreplaceable value of such a place was a pearl trampled deep into the filth of ignorance by a greed-driven battle of swine that had craved dominance over a trough of meaningless offal.

Such a gift Ubtao had given, only to be wasted on fools.

Samrith could see the pain that filled Qawasha. It didn't take much insight to see that Mezro was more than just an oddity or spectacle to him. The ruined city symbolized the death of something special and unique, the rare flower of a divine idea that had been destroyed, a chance for something beyond what has always been the case for people, beyond war, suffering, hatred, division. As she looked at the city, she understood that here had been a new idea, a community where those who lived could choose to walk the Maze and be brought into harmony with those around them. What manner of citizen would such a city produce? What could the Mezroans have accomplished had it not fallen? Tears suddenly began to well up within her eyes, as Samrith confronted something bigger than her mind could process—the sacred, abandoned for petty concerns.

"I must go to the center and see if Ubtao will hear my heart," Qawasha said.

"Well, you're not going down there alone," Zara replied.



Once they reached the floor of the river valley, they began their trek to the banks of the Olung and Mezro. They walked under vine-laden trees and across clear streams that ran down to the river. As they moved closer to the walls of the city, more and more ruins poked through the thinning jungle flora like tombstones from a long-forgotten graveyard.

"The outskirts of Mezro," Qawasha said. "Many people once lived here." He ran his hand over one of the moss-covered stones and wondered how many had passed through this very place and had laid

hands on this stone. They could see the crumbling walls now, and every so often there were wide gaps where they had collapsed into rubble. Through the gaps they caught glimpses of the inner city, buildings several stories tall set apart by narrow alleys and streets. As they clambered over a pile of collapsed stones and took their first steps within the city, Samrith could see that one of the streets opened out onto one of the grand avenues that led to the temple. Even though the street was covered by the snarled roots of strangler figs and thick leaves of jungle plants, Samrith could make out the masonry of the avenue—massive blocks of stone shaped and crafted with amazing precision.

“Down there.” Samrith pointed.

It was cramped as they moved down the street toward the grand avenue, piled high with rubble and several large trees had grown up from the cobbles, narrowing the passage. Halfway down, the wind shifted, and the air became foul.

Zara froze. “Damn,.” she swore under her breath. “Undead.”

Qawasha gripped his staff and imbued it with druidic magic in preparation for a fight. He tried to get an idea of where the undead were, but the street was clogged with roots and rocks, and the windows in the hollowed-out buildings made the breeze swirl.

“It’s coming from one of these...” Qawasha’s words were drowned by the groans of zombies. Several lurched out from within the dark holes of the ruined buildings and others emerged from dark pools of stagnant water.

“Stay tight to me and keep moving,” Zara said as she drew her sword. “We have to make it to the avenue. We’re dead if we get trapped in here.”

Zombies poured into the street ahead and behind them./ Some scrabbled over one another, slipping on the cobblestones while others tried to reach through cracks in the walls that rose precariously on either side of the street. Samrith used her pack as a shield, warding off cadaverous claws as Zara rushed forward, hacking off limbs and heads as she went. In some places, they had to scramble single file as they moved around tree trunks and past collapsed buildings, but the

street was being filled fast with undead.

Qawasha retreated as he swung his staff with both hands, crushing zombie heads as Zara led the way. “They’re coming faster!” Qawasha warned. Samrith saw the druid’s skin ripple with magical power and take on the appearance of tree bark as a zombie bit down and shattered its rotting teeth on his arm. Undead poured onto the street behind them and clawed their way toward Qawasha as Zara swung her blade like a scythe.

“We’re almost there!” Zara yelled, breathing heavy.

“There’s too many behind us!” Samrith said and wondered how long the druid could hold out.

Overhead, Qawasha heard a short series of staccato croaks. As he looked up, he could see a host of vegepygmyies along the tops of the ruined buildings all heaving on large sticks like pry bars on the unstable stones. Within moments, the precarious walls on either side of the street collapsed on the zombie horde, crushing them to a rancid pulp. Zara slashed through the remaining undead, and finally they burst out onto the street, gasping for air.

As they caught their breath, Zara and Samrith saw Qawasha look up and call to the odd creatures on the rooftop. “Kupa! My friend!” He said to one of the fungal humanoids as it clambered down. Qawasha knelt before his friend and raised his hands, palms facing Kupalué in the traditional greeting of the vegepygmyies. Kupalué put his hands on Qawasha’s, as dozens of tiny tendrils reached out to touch him. They remained in silent communion for a moment before Qawasha opened his eyes to see Kupalué’s face.

It must be difficult to be made of meat. Kupalué gestured to Qawasha and they both burst into laughter.



Kupalúé (Select to view)

The four companions stood at the edge of water that flooded the grand avenue. From where they were, they could see the center of the city, a circular plaza inundated with water from the Olung. The water moved slow through the city and reflected the sun like a rippling mirror. After meeting Kupalúé and his vegepygmy tribe, they scoured the area for more signs of undead and monsters, but other than the unsettling residue of the Spellplague, Mezro was silent.

“Over there would have been the beginning of the Maze,” Qawasha said, as he pointed back up the avenue. “You can tell because the architecture of Ubtao begins there and runs all the way to the center.”

Samrith could see the stonework of Ubtao begin where the irregular masonry of the Mezroans left off. The two styles were worlds apart. The blocks used in the Maze were much bigger, some as large as small barns, placed together like an enormous puzzle, connected with near seamless joinery. The stones of the Maze created the walls on either side of the grand avenue, but as they gradually pitched into the flooded center, the once flawless seams had opened and now plants, roots and small trees grew from them.

Qawasha walked to the beginning of the grand avenue and gazed along it. Samrith stood alongside him and looked down toward the center as well.

“The power is no longer here. The Maze is broken,” Qawasha said. As much as Samrith wanted to console her friend, even she could tell that the power that was once here had been long lost.

“I’m sorry, Qawasha,” Samrith said. She had all but forgotten her fascination and curiosity at the history of the place as she stood with Qawasha. She knew that the druid had put great expectations on being able to possibly walk the Maze and experience its power. She knew that no words could set things right. She reached in her pocket and took out the charm that the chwinga had given her, she looked at its strange design and handed it to Qawasha. “Maybe this can do some good?”

Qawasha smiled and took the charm, and in an instant, the magic from it surged through his body like a fire. Then, with a startled look, Qawasha vanished in a flash of light.



Qawasha stood within Mezro as it once looked, as if Ubtao had just set the final stone. The city shimmered in the sunlight and magic coursed through it like a river of light.

The sun shone with soft rainbows of light and the sounds, smells and vivid colors of the city overwhelming Qawasha. He looked for

Samrith and the others but there was no sign of them. He wondered if he had been transported to the realm of the barae, the paradise that the elders and sages spoke of where Mezro had been taken to save it from the depredations of the world. Qawasha looked to the sun, its light dazzling the grand avenue of the Maze before him; at the end of its path, the shimmering walls of the crystal temple rose up into the blue sky like some mystical jewel. Even from where he stood, he could feel it was made of magic.

Qawasha walked to the edge of the Maze, not knowing what, if anything, to expect. The magic he felt here was far more powerful than anything he had ever experienced, powerful enough to create a new reality and transport an entire city. Now he understood why people had feared the power of the barae and for a moment, Qawasha felt fear course into him—what if the barae saw his intrusion as a threat? A few fearful thoughts flashed through his mind, but Qawasha paused and focused on the yearning in his heart. All he wanted was to ask Ubtao for forgiveness, for the evil to be banished, and for all people to live in peace and harmony. How could this bring the wrath of the barae and of Ubtao? And with that, he stepped into the Maze.

In a blinding flash, he was transported across miles of jungle as if on a flying carpet to a long-lost city, sunken into the ground like the skin of a rotten fruit sagging into its moldering core. As he descended, he knew he was near the center of the evil that plagued Chult—he could feel it buzzing like a hornet’s nest.

His attention was pulled into a dark passage, and at the end of it was a door with symbols of animals that Qawasha recognized—trickster gods, native to Chult. The symbols glowed in a pattern and the door opened to reveal a passageway into blackness. He entered, and as he did, he transformed into the nine animals, one after another, each transformation allowing enough time for him to feel their strange personalities as he moved deeper into what felt more and more like a tomb. As their spirits entered him, each of the trickster gods told him the story of their creation and how they had come to be trapped within the tomb. And when Qawasha would ask each god, “Where are you taking me?” Each god would reply, “You’ll see. You’ll see.”

Qawasha passed through many rooms, each one made from an evil mind. He could feel the madness that fashioned this place, the

desperation of the slaves who carved and set the stone, as the trickster gods pulled him ever deeper until they reached the core, and Qawasha could feel it pulsing behind a huge door.

Then a woman's voice whispered in his ear: "This is the cost."

The door opened to reveal a terrifying device, an enormous crystal cylinder suspended by metal struts over a pool of fire. Through some intuition, Qawasha knew that this device was choking all life across the world, trapping it within the cylinder, filling it with spectral energy which swirled with wraiths that moaned in pain. But that wasn't the worst. From the cylinder came a slick, black umbilicus that fed a grotesque monster which hovered in the air beside it—a cursed neoteny of some forgotten god that burbled and clutched the air as it groped with its claws for living flesh.

It took everything for Qawasha to look at it. His senses were being overwhelmed like a rowboat in a tsunami, for not only was the cause of Chult's decay and decline before him in all its horror, but he now understood, as if he had lived it himself, every detail of why and how this tomb had come to be. Tears streamed down his face as the realization of the tomb and its purpose sank into his being. Qawasha shut his eyes, unable to witness the scene any longer.

"Now you know," the woman's voice said.



When Qawasha opened his eyes, he was in a crystal room larger than five of the Grand Coliseums at Port Nyanzaru. He stood before the figure of a woman who glowed with a divine radiance, and behind her stood the five other barae, the warrior priests of Mezro.

"You have been knocking on the door for some time now," the woman said. "And now it has been opened to you."

Qawasha looked around for a sign that he was dreaming, but the closer he looked, the more real everything became. He could make out the city and sky surrounding the crystal temple, but divine light suffused the walls making them translucent and only revealed vague silhouettes of the buildings and avenues outside.

"How do I stop it? How do I destroy it?" Qawasha asked, still reeling

from the vision within the tomb.

“By walking the same path that brought you here. By following that feeling that never leaves you the same way a tiger stalks its prey,” the woman replied.

Qawasha thought of that feeling within him. The feeling that pulled him into the jungle as a young man, that led him to Kupalué, Samrith and Zara. He thought about how each of them had played a crucial part of his being in the crystal temple, how their actions had brought him to this place. Every step of the way, Qawasha had moved into the unknown, yet at the same time, it all felt like it had been orchestrated by some divine hand.

“Life is the Maze and Mezro is the universe.” The woman said as she, the other barae, and the crystal temple began to fade. “You have always walked it.”



Qawasha blinked back into existence.

“Thank Oghma you’re back,” Samrith said with a gasp. “Where did you go?”

Zara and Kupalué ran up to Qawasha. Zara clapped him on the shoulder with a look of relief while Kupalué wrapped his arms around him.

“What in the Nine Hells happened?” Zara asked.

“I walked the Maze,” Qawasha said to them. “That charm you gave me, Samrith, it opened up a gateway to Mezro.”

“You walked the Maze? Holy hells. You were only gone for a second,” Zara said.

“What was it like?” Samrith asked. “Was it filled with people? Did you enter the temple?”

“The city was in another world, silent and beautiful. No people were there, but when I walked the Maze, I saw everything that has gone wrong. I saw the evil that is causing all the rot in our land, and I saw

where it has been buried.” Qawasha could feel his mind and body recoil as the memory of what he had comprehended within the tomb’s core crawled through his being like a toxic spider. “Then I went to the crystal temple and saw the barae, six of them, glowing with power. A woman spoke to me. She was wise, powerful, yet I could feel a deep sadness within her, as if she yearned for someone.”

“What did she say?” Samrith and the group walked with Qawasha, sat him down on a stone and gathered around.

“She told me to follow the path set before me. She said the Maze is everywhere and told me to continue. It is hard to describe, but all I can say now is that I know what must be done.”

Qawasha took a stone and drew a crude map of Chult in the dirt. “Deep in the jungle, here,” Qawasha indicated a point near the center of the map, “lies the entrance to a tomb, hidden within a sunken city. At the deepest part of this tomb is a terrible artifact created by a being of evil, a lord of the undead, who wishes to steal the life from the world. The artifact is guarded by an abomination of immense power. The Maze showed me that I must destroy this artifact. Only then can the flow of life be restored. Only then can Mezro and Ubtao return.”

“Then it has to be stopped,” Samrith said. “We must find this sunken city.”

“To reach this tomb from Port Nyanzaru would take an expedition of many days. To get through the jungle alive, we would need more swords. You might want to learn how to use one,” Zara said, elbowing Samrith.

“I think I’ll stick to my books and leave the fighting to the experts, thank you very much.”

The tribe will help. We can scout for meat eaters. Kupalué gestured.

“If we are to do this, there is much preparation we have before us. We are not yet ready to face what I have seen. There are things in the tomb that are not of this world.” Qawasha looked with grave intent into the faces of his friends. “It isn’t something to be taken lightly.”

“I can dust off my father’s old spellbooks. Learn to be a wizard like

he was,” Samrith said. “I keep lugging them around the world with me, maybe now it’s time I put them to use.”

“I can pick up some new techniques from a trainer in Nyanzaru I was working with just before we left. A few more months with her and I’ll be ready to carve a path right through this tomb of yours, Qawasha,” Zara said, as she drew her sword and swung it in a few graceful arcs.

Qawasha looked at this unlikely band of adventurers, each one from a different place in the world, and yet each bound by a desire to bring good to it. Not long ago, he would have thought his recent experience impossible, but here he was having walked through the Maze, having met the barae in the crystal temple, having seen the soul stealing device that choked the life from his world. After what he had been through, he knew he had no idea how the multiverse worked and what it had in store for him around the next turn of the Maze.

It was there, as the party left the ruins of Mezro for Port Nyanzaru, that Qawasha finally found his answer.

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Myke Cole Armored Saint

Author Myke Cole on gaming in warzones and how D&D players can tie you in knots...

Applauded for the authenticity of his writing, former military consultant Myke Cole brought the worlds of modern warfare and fantasy battles together in his *Shadow Ops* and *Reawakening* series of books. Currently serving as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and working in intelligence for the NYPD,



Myke Cole

outward appearances suggest he has perfectly balanced the artistic and professional sides of his life.

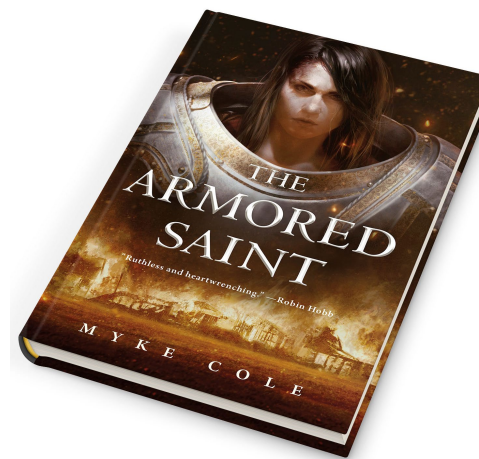
It's therefore fitting at a point that we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of *The Crystal Shard* that Cole explains how R.A. Salvatore's dark elf better sums up his existence.

"I spend half my life in the intensely formal world of law enforcement, the military and intelligence, and half my life in the intensely maverick world of science fiction and fantasy and the arts," the author explains. "I've always felt that I didn't fit in at either place, and reading about someone who had the same experience was incredibly affirming."

"The strength of both the Dark Elf and Icewind Dale trilogies are that they are stories of a person cut off from community and society. Drizzt is an outcast among the dark elves for being decent, and an outcast among the people of Ten Towns for being drow. This was what made him so inspiring for me—if he could carve a path through a life where everyone had a bone to pick with him, then so could I."

Cole's latest novel, *The Armored Saint*, is the first book in the *Sacred Throne* trilogy, and moves the author away from his mashup of modern and magical fighting styles. The new series takes things back to medieval times and adds another fantasy twist.

"Writing this was a relief for me," he admits. "I wrote six modern-military fantasy books that were hard-edged, fire-team level, Harry Potter joins the Navy Seals-type



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stories. And I was constantly being praised for the authenticity: ‘It’s so clear that the author is really in the military.’ And after six books you start to get a complex and wonder are people buying this because it’s good or because it’s authentic. So I developed a real need to prove to myself and the audience that I could write outside that sub-genre, and *The Armored Saint* is the result.”

How much does your military background inform your writing?

The first book I wrote, *Control Point*, was this merger of both sides of my personality. One half is the D&D piece of me—nerdy, magic, hill giants and goblins; and the other half is this hard-edged military piece.

The heroine of your new trilogy, Heloise, has a whole different set of problems to deal with...

She’s a young girl living in a village and the medieval inspiration for the tone of the story is Merovingian Gaul, a sort of modern day France in Burgundy from the period before Charlemagne [Charles I]. However, there’s one important technological difference in that a semi-magic technology called a seed stone—a sort of steampunk-type technology that’s very tightly prescribed by the ruling class—allows wizards to reach into hell and channel magic. That gives them amazing power but it’s extremely dangerous. If a wizard loses control, a portal will appear in their eye and the devils will cross the veil between hell and our world and emerge to terrorize humanity.

To prevent this from happening, a religious order—very much like Dominican inquisitor monks from the real medieval world—arise to kill any wizard. If they even suspect wizardry of being practiced they will destroy that village, kill every living thing, and leave no two stones standing on top of one another. They’re not kidding around

when they say, ‘Suffer no wizard to live.’ They’re very cruel and draconian and their reign keeps the peasant populace in a state of bondage. Heloise grows up and doesn’t want to live like that and sets forth to resist it. But just because the order is cruel, doesn’t mean it’s wrong, and that’s where the wackiness ensues.

Is there a touch of Joan of Arc about Heloise?

Absolutely. In the dedication of this book I give a rundown not just of Joan of Arc but of the Trung Sisters and Razia Sultana, to try and salute real women warriors from every culture I can find. It was such an amazing exercise researching them to get a scope of it. So she is Joan of Arc, because that’s what is common for us westerners, but she’s also Emilia Platter and Running Eagle and a lot of other women warriors throughout history.

This is an example of grimdark literature. How bleak can you make a world or a situation before it pushes the reader too far?

I don’t know if you’re familiar with Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* but that’s a great example of it being done right. It’s so harrowing and horrible but at the very end, without being unrealistic, McCarthy manages to give you a tiny tingle of the transcendence of humanity, which makes it all worthwhile. So there is a limit to what I can drag the reader through and finding that limit is the tough balance. But I do try to make it as rough as possible and to push that as far as I can.

You’ve switched from writing about modern military tactics to medieval battles. Are there any other topics you’re still keen to cover?

One big boost came from an unlikely quarter. The UK TV show *Hunted* came to the U.S. and I was recruited to be on the show. I was working with Ben Owen, who is the star of the UK show. It’s a reality series where I was hunting fugitives across the United States, which has nothing to do with science fiction and fantasy, but being on a major network TV show helps raise your public profile. I’ve always been a frustrated academic and loved ancient warfare, so I leveraged that profile to write my first ancient history book. There’s very little written about warfare in the Hellenistic period after the death of Alexander the Great, and normally you’d have to be a professor or have a PhD to write that, but I was able to do it. That will be coming out in the fall.

Do you still make it to your weekly game night?

I do. I game with friends. We play some D&D and do a lot of board gaming. What I've done to bring people into the fold who are not as familiar with hardcore roleplaying is start them out with board games like *Wrath of Ashardalon* or *Ravenloft*.

A good way to get them into it is to start them out with a board game. That way at least they get used to visualizing the world and projecting themselves into a character. Then you can lead them down the garden path and get them to the fifth edition D&D starter set. If you're patient and you're willing to do it that way, you will win a lot of converts. And that's worth it to me.

Is it true you always play paladins in D&D?

I religiously play paladins. It matches my own attachment to the importance of law and order in life. I have lived my life to get as close to knighthood as a modern American can, and the first edition paladin, with his +5 *holy avenger* and his summoned warhorse, are the trappings of my soul.

You did three tours in Iraq. Can you nerd out in that kind of environment, and play D&D in a war zone?

First of all it depends where you are. If you're in a combat outpost in the Korengal Valley in Afghanistan it might be a little tougher, although people did. But it definitely goes on down-range on tour. When I was at the U.S. Embassy in 2006 there was a cork board in the main room by one of Saddam Hussein's fountains and you could find any tabletop or



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roleplaying game on there. There would be some military group that would be playing that night and you could sign up. I was playing *Morrowind*, *The Elder Scrolls* game, and I got rocketed. They started shooting at us with 107mm Chinese-made rockets while we were playing.

Have any of your real-life skills made it into D&D? For example, you're a former kendo champion, so have any of your characters fought using kendo?

They have. But the wonderful thing about D&D players is that they break everything. I was playing with Peter V. Brett, who is another fantasy writer whose *Demon Cycle* series I absolutely adore—full disclosure, he is my best friend, but even if we were enemies I'd still think he's one of the greatest writers in fantasy. When I did medieval reenactment sword fighting, one of my styles was called oldcastle, named after Duke Sir Gyrth Oldcastle who was one of the progenitors of this fighting style. With your left arm you put your shield straight out, and with your right arm you almost stick your elbow in your ear. Then you let your sword hang down between your shoulder blades, flush with your back. This conceals the blade from your enemy's vision but it doesn't slow you down much. You can then come from any direction without revealing your movement until the last second, when it's really too late for the opponent to react. That's the reason it's worthwhile doing.

So I had an NPC strike this pose when Pete was playing a fremlin thief. A fremlin is a humanoid race of winged, almost pixie-like creatures. Pete had an unbreakable elven rope, so when the sword master struck this pose, his fremlin flew around him three times and tied the sword to his back, ruining my plan to have this great show of his skills. It was an excellent example of how you set up something really cool as a DM, and a player finds a way to break it.

The Armored Saint *, the first book in the Sacred Throne trilogy, is available now.*

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Behind the Screens: Shared World Building

Sam Weigelt and Chris Tulach find that many hands make light work when it comes to building believable worlds in D&D...

Sam Weigelt: Dungeons & Dragons is the best way to hang out with friends. The experience of shared storytelling is incredibly fun, and a great way to get to know people better. So, why not start that collaboration before the story even begins?

Many campaigns start out with the question, “How do you know each other?” So a DM’s job often begins with telling the players where they are. But instead of these beginnings for a campaign, let’s make the process more collaborative. In today’s article, we’ll talk about creating a setting with the assistance of your players, and how it can benefit your next campaign.

One of the wonderful advantages for collaborative world building is that it gives players an investment in the setting. While it's not hard to have players care about the noble knight in need of rescue or the dragon who needs to be slain, sometimes it's easy for them to forget about the town's baker and blacksmith.

It can also be hard for players to absorb the information about their allies and adversaries in the heat of the moment. By helping to create these NPCs themselves, players get a more grounded view of the place their characters are inhabiting, and this gives them a sense of a home that's worth defending.

Shared world building isn't a new concept, but the method Wizards of the Coast's Chris Tulach has pioneered provides structure and takes a lot of the pressure out of the process. It's also something that any gaming group can try.

I had the opportunity to participate in Chris's system as a player about three years ago. Recently, I decided to try it out with my regular gaming group. This system lets you rely on your players to help fill in some details about the world they'll be living in, while simultaneously giving each of them a different share of information about their home and the NPCs with whom they'll be interacting.

Nobody can explain the system better than its creator, so here we'll leave that job to Chris himself...

Cooperative Campaign Building



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Chris Tulach: As a Dungeon Master, it's a lot of work to build a new campaign, especially if you want to create a setting that your players care about. Chapter 1 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* offers great advice on the process of creating the setting and a campaign within it, but sometimes you'd like the players to help you build out the playable zones and campaign hooks. Enter cooperative campaign building! Not only does it invest the players in the game early, but it gets everyone sharing their creative ideas in a controlled manner.

Here's how it works:

Prework

Before you have your players create characters, let them know that you'll be having a campaign creation session. It's possible that you might have enough time to do campaign creation and character creation at the same session.



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Create a small area map (the size of a province or kingdom, see page 14 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), filling in only the geographic features and settlements. Don't name anything yet.

Grab some sheets of paper or index cards. At the top of each one, write the name of a geographic feature from your map on it.

Take another pile of sheets or cards and write the names of NPCs; don't define anything else about the characters. *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* has excellent tables with names for all sorts of characters.

Campaign Creation

At the campaign creation session, bring the sheets or cards and enough pens or pencils for everyone, as well as your map.

Prior to the session's start, explain that the players are going to help define the campaign setting by assisting in its creation. Anything an individual player sees at the table can be considered known information that their character possesses at the start of the campaign. They are welcome to write down the information they see during this process for later use.

As a DM, you can choose to participate as a player in this campaign creation session as well, or you can just help direct the group.

Geographic Features

Hand out a geographic feature to each player. Ask them to choose a name for the feature and write it directly below the title. *For example, you hand a player a card with the word "swamp" on it. They write "Fellwater Swamp" below the word "swamp."*

Then have them pass their features to the player on their left at the same time.

Ask each player to now write down an adjective to describe the feature, and then pass the features to the player on their left. *For example, the player to the immediate left of the player who received the "swamp" card sees that it is named Fellwater Swamp. They write "haunted" below that name and pass the card.*

For the next item, ask them to write down an important locale within the feature, and pass the card to the player on their left. *For example, the player with the swamp card has the words "Fellwater Swamp," "haunted," and now writes "mysterious fishing shack."*

For the next item, ask them to write down an important denizen of the feature. *For example, the player with the swamp card has the words*



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“Fellwater Swamp,” “haunted,” “mysterious fishing shack,” and now writes “goblin shaman.” If you have three players, you can be finished at this time and move on to additional features as necessary. You’ll be able to create a bunch of cool adventure sites in only a short time using this method.

This process supports a minimum of three players but is expandable up to six players. It can also be used to create features within a large city as well. Simply write down an important feature within the city instead of a geographic feature.

So, to break it down, geographical features have the following process:

- Start with a feature name (forest, mountain, ruins, etc.)
- Add an adjective
- Add a locale
- Add another locale (if four or more players)
- Add another locale (if six players)
- Add a denizen
- Add another denizen (if five or more players)

NPCs

You can use the same process for NPCs, using the following details:

- Start with an NPC name
- Add a race (human, elf, dwarf, etc.)
- Add a class or profession (fighter, smith, noble, etc.)
- Add a personality trait (gregarious, sly, serious, etc.)
- Add a personality flaw (excessive risk-taker, haughty, sings badly and loudly, etc.)
- Add a campaign role (ally, antagonist, villain, opportunist)
- Add an alignment

For NPCs, three players allow each sheet or card to be passed around the group twice. For four players, you don’t need to detail personality flaw or alignment. For five players, you don’t need to detail alignment.

You can also generate NPCs using denizens noted in the geographic features creation.

What's Next?

You can now begin the process of crafting the setting and campaign details, using the information presented from the session as a starting point and inspiration. Details may need to be adapted to reflect the theme and tone of the campaign, and you should feel free to discuss with your players modifications to some details to create cohesive campaign elements. For example, if someone wrote down something silly like “LOL Café” as the name of a place in your serious epic campaign, you can agree to modify that to “Fool’s Haven.” The players should have lists of notes from the session, and they can use that to help guide their character creation, using places and NPCs as touchpoints for things like bonds.

Using the Tulach System

Sam Weigelt: One thing I like about this system of campaign building is that it is broken into such concise steps; it creates a game out of the creative process for the players. Chris’s system uses elements with which DMs and players of D&D fifth edition will already be familiar. Its process mirrors the one that many DMs would already use for NPC creation while working from the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*. It share’s the tasks of NPC and locale creation in a gamified way that’s easy and fun.

When I first decided to use this system myself, I didn’t remember all the details. That didn’t matter in the end because this system has another great strength; it is flexible and customizable. From my memory of the system, I knew it had the lasting effect of giving each player some hidden information that the others do not possess. For my latest campaign, I decided to lean into that concept heavily and create my own set of details for players to explore.

Room to Customize

I would encourage anyone trying this method for the first time to begin with the details outlined by Chris. Then once you’re comfortable with the system, start to play around with it: add and

remove elements, or mix up how cards are passed around!

For example, if you don't want players to know something as specific as an NPC's alignment, have them create a deeply personal detail about the NPC such as their inner motivation or a secret they've been keeping. For a locale, perhaps add in space for the description of a magic item. That allows players to seed the world with treasures their characters desire (and perhaps their characters wish to go to some of these places precisely because of the rumors they've heard about the treasures there).

When thinking about how the cards/notes are passed around, there are many possibilities. You might decide to pass cards halfway around the table before having them double back for one of the rounds, keeping knowledge of some secretive NPCs more hidden. If you're running a campaign with characters in part of one or two factions, maybe split the table up for a round and have those smaller groups pass around the notes for NPCs in their factions.

How My Group's Session Went

Here are the steps my players took when creating allies for the party:

- Start with a race and gender
- Add a name
- Add a class of profession
- Add a physical description and notable personality traits
- Add an external motivation (what they tell ordinary people)
- Add something you've overheard someone else in town saying about this person
- Add a feat they have accomplished or a notable skill they possess
- Add an inner motivation or secret they've been keeping (what have they told only you)

In this version of the system, players started with general surface-level information about NPCs. Then the details moved toward rumors, finally leading to more personal and private details. Since each detail is made with full knowledge of the details that came before, interesting patterns developed. Sometimes earlier details were clarified or explained in more detail by their inner motivations. Other

times it turned out that who they were at the surface was merely a façade for what lay beneath. The final person to hold the card became the only one who knows the true secrets about the NPC, so they become a trusted friend of their character.

During the session I held with my players, I also had separate creation rounds for friends of the party and antagonists, because I wanted to ensure that we had a good balance of the two. This also ensured that each character had a strong connection with at least one friend and one rival at the start of the campaign. When it came to adversaries, the list of details was a little different, and ended with “What bad thing have they done to you (or have you done to them)?” in order to get a sense of personal connection of rivalry.

One other thing I encouraged my players to do before beginning was to follow-up the geographic feature they were the last person to hold with a few sentences on what happened when they explored it. Since their character knows the most about the area, I thought it would be cool for them to spin a short tale about how they came to know it well. Each player wrote up a paragraph with a mini-adventure their character went on in the area and these mini-adventures gave me a little extra insight into how they see their character as the game begins.

Remember, there is no wrong way to use this method as long as your players are having fun!

How'd it turn out?

I was lucky enough to try this method out with a creative group of players who really enjoyed going through this process. Some of the questions they asked helped me to clarify some of my own assumptions about the campaign setting. Many of the players modified their characters to fit with the friends and rivals with whom they were associated. Finally, I felt a huge burden lifted from my shoulders. This process doesn't just short-cut the initial busy-work of the Dungeon Master; it starts you out with invested players. A player's character fits more comfortably into a world that player helped build.

Now my players are in a town where their characters have personal connections (for better or worse) with a couple of dozen NPCs. In the

first session alone, there were a number of memorable interactions in town as the characters played off their allies and rivals. There was even a point where I had to excuse myself for a moment as the players were setting up camp in a taiga. While I was gone one of the players took it on himself to tell a campfire story of his last trip through the taiga using information from the creation session. I returned to hear the end of the story and the other characters consoling him.

In short; I couldn't be happier.

Further Adventures

I'd like to encourage interested DMs to give Chris's method a try. I've had nothing but positive experiences with it. This method encourages a lot of organic conversations between players. It also provides a stable of NPCs to use as hooks in your story. Try it out, and feel free to customize the system like I did, I think you'll find it can work for a variety of campaign styles. I hope you have as much fun with this method of campaign building as I have!

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Dragonfire: Building a Cleric

Randall Bills, Managing Developer at Catalyst Game Labs, provides tips on creating a powerful cleric in deck-building game Dragonfire.

Based on the popular *Shadowrun: Crossfire* card game, co-operative deck builder *Dragonfire* pits two-to-six adventurers against the dangerous dungeons it generates. Fully adapted for Dungeons & Dragons, it stays true to the spirit of the tabletop roleplaying game by promoting character empowerment and teamwork.

Players start as first-level characters, choosing a race (from dwarf and elf to half-orc and human) and equipping themselves with weapons, spells, and magic items as they assume the quintessential roles of cleric, rogue, fighter, and wizard.

The first *Dragonfire* release has an MSRP of \$59.99 and contains five Encounters decks, Market and Magic Items decks, Character and Adventure cards, an Adventure booklet, sticker sheets, tokens, plastic clips, and a rulebook.

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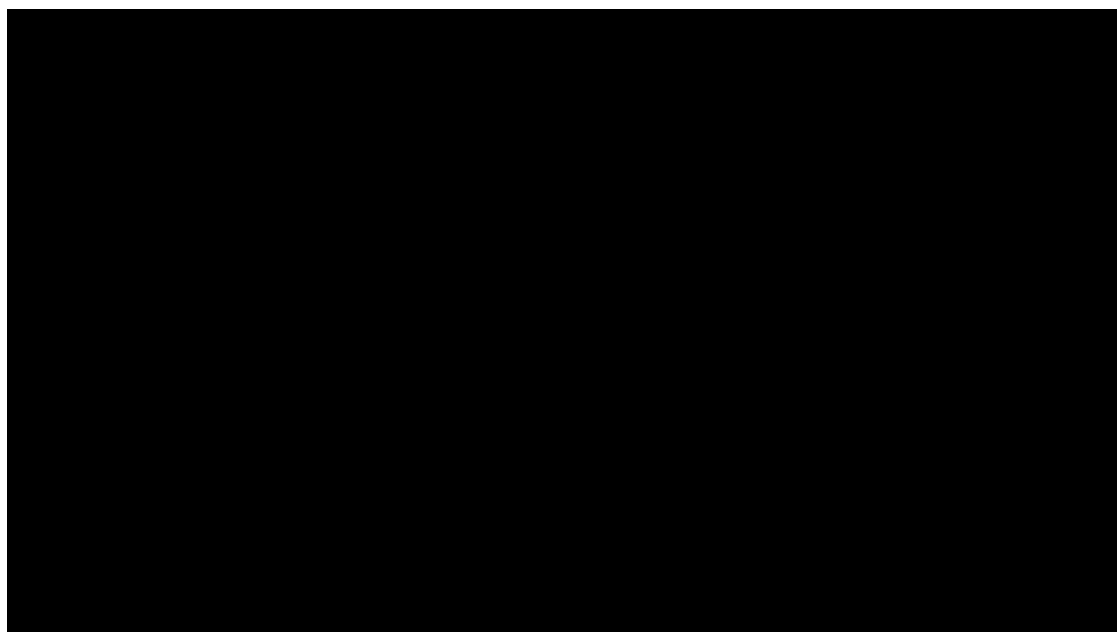


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Each player starts with a small deck and as they acquire further cards—usually from a common selection available to everyone—they become more powerful.

As with the D&D tabletop RPG, there's a wider mission to accomplish, in this case decided by one of the Adventure cards. That might be a standard dungeon crawl, an operation to safeguard a noble, or an assignment to retrieve an item. If you're wondering where the Dungeon Master is, that role is carried out by the 'Encounters' decks.

To get a feel for the game, watch Geek & Sundry host Becca Scott run through *Dragonfire*'s mechanics in her How To Play video.



Now you understand how it works, let Randall Bills, Managing Developer at Catalyst Game Labs, explain the deeper strategy of how to build a cleric using Life Domain.

BUILDING A CLERIC: LIFE DOMAIN

While *Dragonfire* can be wonderful as a one-off game, the full experience of it is revealed during campaign play. Building experience points (XP) across numerous Adventures allows Feature stickers to be unlocked. Not only will these increase the power of your character, but by carefully building overlapping Feature abilities, that power expands exponentially.

However, there are a few issues to keep in mind as you're wrapping your head around these options. First and foremost, you need a fair amount of XP to unlock the true potential of such overlapping Features. That just means more *Dragonfire* action at your table!

Second, there's a lot to tackle here. And we mean a *lot*. The base game includes 132 different Features, while *Character Pack: Heroes of the Sword Coast* brings 76 more to the table. The upcoming *Campaign Box: Moonshae Storms* and *Character Pack: Heroes of the Wild* will drop more than 150 additional Features—we know, that's daunting! But the first thing to remember is not all Class Types and Character Classes can make use of all the Features.

For example, if we wanted to build a Cleric, there are three types of Features to select from:

- Generic Features
- Devotion Features
- Cleric Features.

After a quick review, there are 50 generic, no Devotion-only, and 15 Cleric-only Features currently available. However, the Cleric-only are easily divided into various Subclass Features—a branching tree, if you will. That places all of the Life Domain Subclass Features under the Life Domain Feature, meaning you cannot take any of those Features without first choosing Life Domain. The same applies to War Domain. This will help you to start focusing on the direction you want to take. If you want to be a support class-style character, ignore

War Domain, which removes six Features from your consideration.



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With those things in mind, let's dive into building a Life Domain Cleric at a few different stages. In this instance, we're grabbing the Shield Dwarf screen, both because it's one of our favorite character illustrations in all of fifth edition, but also because it works well alongside either the Life Domain or War Domain Subclass within the Cleric Class.



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Often the Primary Subclass Feature for any Character Class doesn't provide a lot of new power. Instead, it's setting the groundwork for what will come, and slightly tweaks your Character's Equipment Pack in that direction. As such, even as you're looking at focusing on a specific Character Class and its Subclass—in this case, Life Domain—you may want to focus on generic Features at the start.

That is really going to come down to your play style. There are plenty of options if you want to be offensive or defensive in your games. If the options still seem overwhelming, never hesitate to simply boost

your gold, starting hand, or HP by 1. Those are all very effective. You can even double down on that once you've earned some XP to spend.

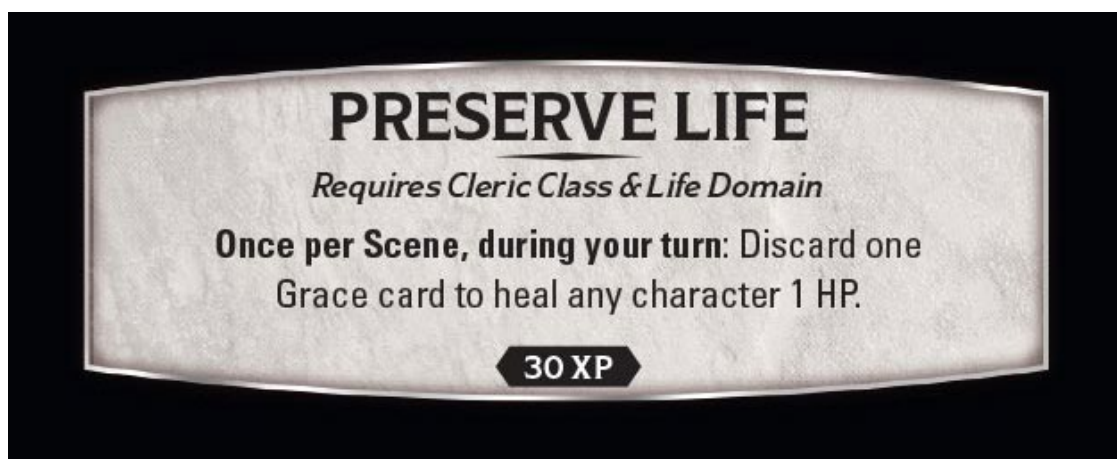
For example, for our Shield Dwarf, we can snag the Wealthy Feature at 10 XP (if we cover up a Background Feature, or waiting for another 5 XP if you'd prefer to open another slot). Then once we've got 25 more XP (the extra 5 XP to unlock the second slot, provided we dumped the existing Background), I can grab Riches—we are a Dwarf, after all—giving us two extra starting gold. That's six gold at the beginning of each game. If I'm lucky and *Healing Word* shows up in the Market in the first round or two, we'll grab it right away, and our healing capability is off and running.



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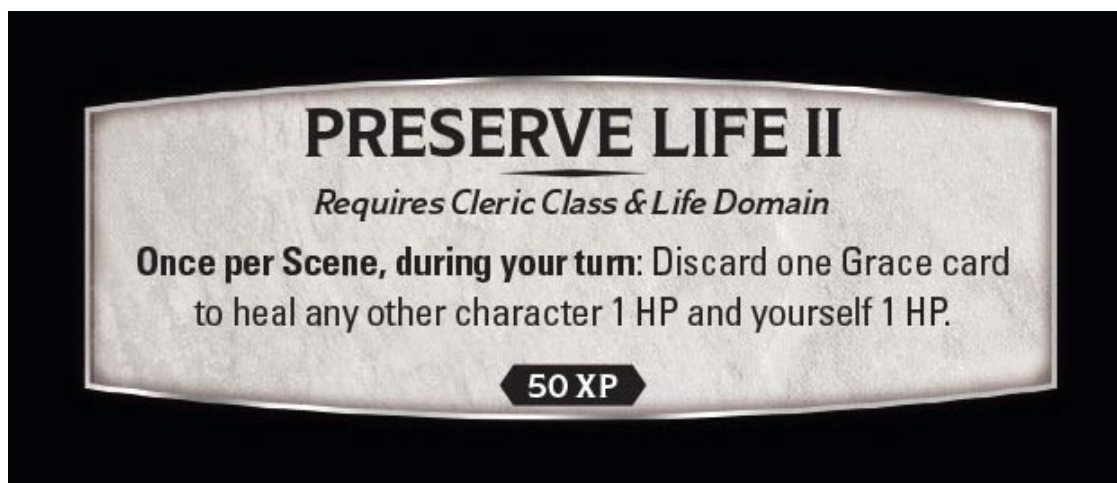
Once you've built up 30 to 50 XP, you can start diving heavily into the Life Domain Features. If you've already built up enough for the Wealthy and Riches Features, you can trade those almost as a straight swap for Life Domain and Disciple of Life.

Now you may be thinking, “Why is returning a *Grace* so good?” Never underestimate what can be accomplished with your Basic cards. The higher-powered Market cards are great, but unlike almost any other deck-building game, where you will want to dump your starting cards as quickly as possible so the more powerful cards cycle through quicker, Basic cards retain their usefulness in *Dragonfire*. Not only do they unlock the color puzzle—many a loss can be laid directly at the feet of not having the right color combinations—but higher Features will also unlock additional abilities found on those Basic cards.



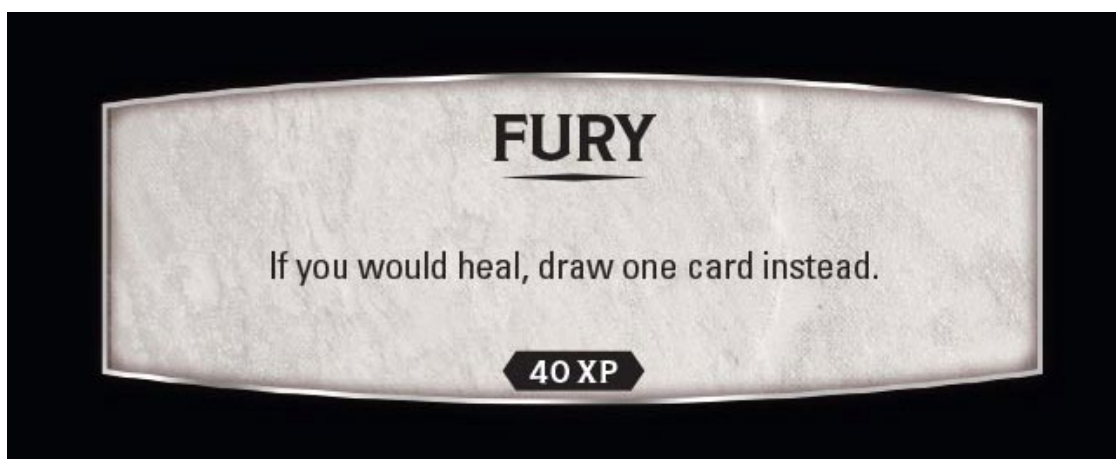
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For that lower end, it's about making sure you can provide that green Devotion damage the party needs. However, once you've got another 40 XP (the extra 10 for the third Feature slot) under your belt, you can unlock a third Life Domain Feature in Preserve Life. And suddenly you can use a card to heal—say *Cure Wounds*, *Healing Word*, or even the *Healing Magic Item*—which allows you to activate Disciple of Life to pull a *Glory* back into your hand. Then you're all set up to provide another heal by discarding a *Glory* as you activate Preserve Life once per Scene.



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You can then push that higher and grab Preserve Life II, which expands that ability.



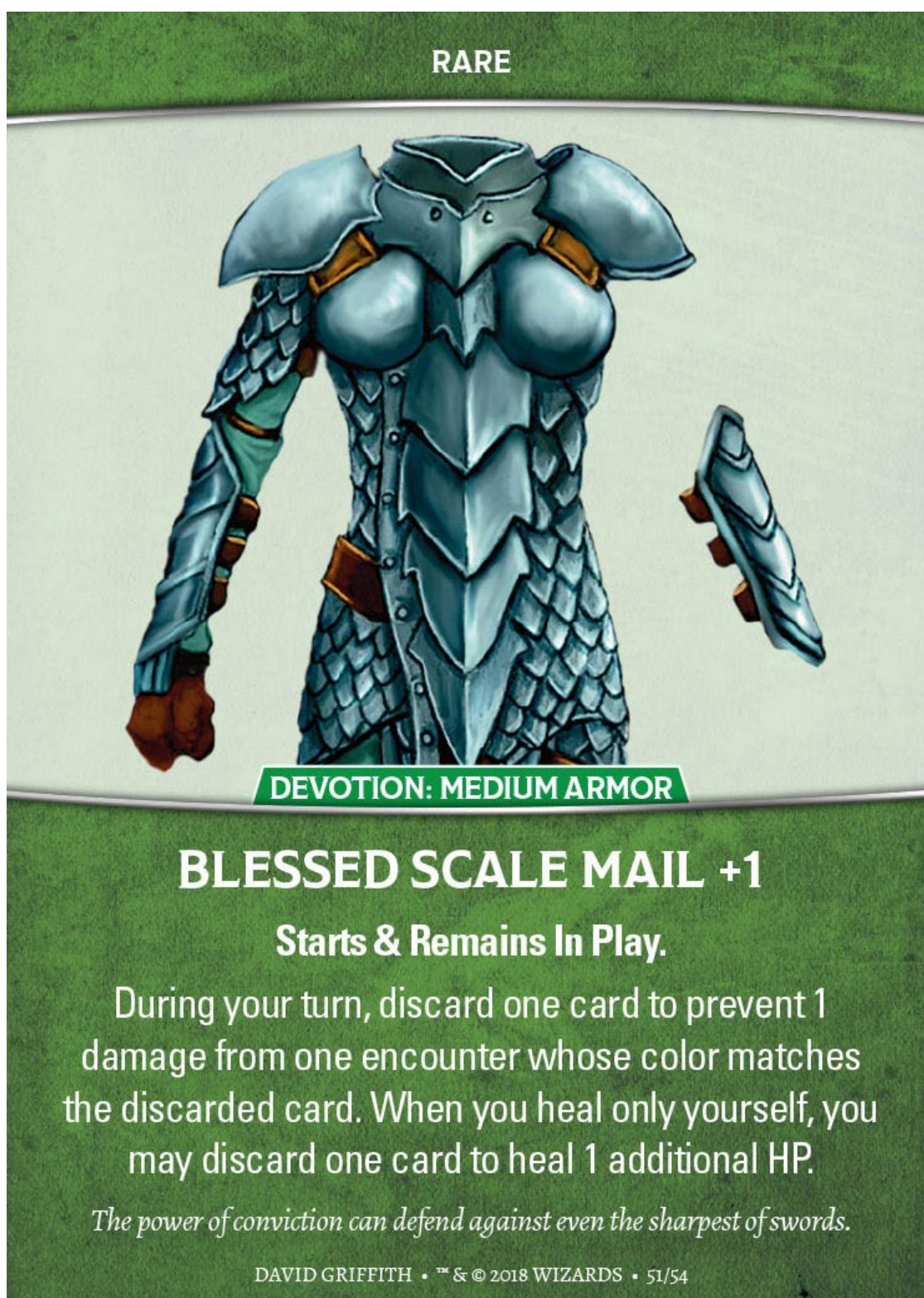
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Once you've pushed up into the 150 XP range, you can ratchet that even higher by adding a generic Feature, Fury, which allows you to mix and match healing with drawing a card, as the situation merits. I recently playtested this exact build, and it's wonderfully powerful. I dumped well over a dozen HP back into the game to keep us going against some very deadly encounters.



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It's important to note that as you're creating this build, you don't need to sit around with a pile of unused XP. For example, moving from Life Domain and Disciple of Life at 40 XP to adding the third Preserve Life slot requires an additional 40 XP. There are some excellent 5 XP and 10 XP Features to help you along the way. Fundamentals can let you add another *Glory*, which your Features are already starting to use, and *Caravan*... wow, can that be an important Feature! If you've not played with Caravan yet, just try it once, and you may never have a party without it again.



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And don't forget, as you're earning those Features, you can try focusing on Magic Items as well. Some players have issues with consumable Common Magic Items, which they feel lack the power to justify inclusion in their deck. Those that do use them see their effectiveness increase as their own power builds. For example, the *Healing* Magic Item card is useful by itself, but gets a boost when

you add in the extra abilities provided by your Features during healing. In one game we actually started with four *Healings*. And wait until you've got all of that lined up and you manage to score the *Blessed Scale Mail* +1 Rare Magic Item!

Obviously, this is just one possible build for Life Domain. We haven't showcased the Turn Undead Features, Divine Strike or even Supreme Healing, all of which are slightly different takes—and of course, there's a whole other set of awesome combinations that can be built for the War Domain. But this build utilizing Life Domain shows how you can look at overlapping potentials and build toward that in your campaign to really start knocking some scary monsters down!

Randall N. Bills has lead the development and publication of hundreds of novels, sourcebooks, rulebooks, box sets, game aides and more. He's currently the Managing Developer for Catalyst Game Labs, overseeing the strategic development of the perennial *BattleTech* and *Shadowrun* properties, while managing the rollout of Catalyst Game Labs' new line of tabletop games, including core development of *Dragonfire*.

BACK TO TOP

The Best of the Dungeon Masters Guild

New DMs Guild columnist Shawn Merwin takes a trip into the Ruins of Matolo with fellow Guild Adept Cindy Moore.



The Dungeon Masters Guild is the perfect platform for creating, sharing, and publishing your adventures. Since its launch, hundreds of DMs, players, and fans have created new characters, monsters, spells, and locations, bringing a wealth of options and detail to the Forgotten Realms.

The array of products currently available on the Guild is astonishing, and more is added daily. But with so many choices, how do you know which ones to pick? Well, Dragon+ is here to help. Each issue, we shine a spotlight on some of the best content on the DMs Guild,

and speak to its creators to learn how it was made. Creative pursuits like game writing are challenging, because work is often created in a vacuum. The DMs Guild is a place where creators can come together, and consumers can provide the much-needed feedback they crave. Creators want the reassurance that their work is worth the effort, but they also want the constructive criticism that helps them improve their craft.

Going forward, this column will look at DMs Guild products with that sense of nurturing criticism. It will draw attention to high-quality products, offering an honest review of their merits, while discussing issues that everyone can learn from.

In this inaugural game design column, we look at *Ruins of Matolo: Discovery*, a short fifth edition D&D adventure created by Guild Adept Cindy Moore. Usually costing \$2.99 on the DMs Guild, it is free for the duration of this issue of *Dragon+*.



[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

CREATOR Q&A

Adventure designer Cindy Moore talks *Ruins of Matolo: Discovery*.

DMs Guild Adept Cindy Moore has been active both as a DM and RPG player for over 30 years. She began her RPG-writing career as co-author of the Land Ho! mini campaign setting for EN Publishing and has authored several D&D Adventure League modules. She is currently the coordinator and administrator for the Hillsfar region series of AL adventures from Baldman Games.

When you knew *Ruins of Matolo* would be your *Tomb of Annihilation* product supplement as a Guild Adept, what was the first thing you did?

Let me start with where I got the idea to use Matolo, as it's not mentioned in the *Tomb of Annihilation*. The location is part of the Adventurers League Season Seven narrative, given to the writers of those adventures.

At first I started to connect this story to the Adventurers League module I was also writing [*Putting the Dead to Rest*], and a revision of *Ruins of Matolo* will be released that suggests ways to connect it to that adventure. I intended *Ruins of Matolo* to introduce the town and act as a preview of what was happening there. I was hesitant to use the location because, at that time, I did not know whether *Ruins of Matolo* would be made legal for Adventurers League characters. It was entirely possible that this module would not be recognized as a prequel, but a copy of something the Adventurer's League wrote.

You did your own layout. Was that difficult, and did you have to teach yourself anything?

I created the adventure in Microsoft Publisher and was familiar with it. However, I had never used it to do the layout for a product like this. I had to teach myself many things in order to get the pages uniform.

Did you rely on others for any parts of the product, other than art?

I used other contributors only for the art. I commissioned a cartographer recently to create maps for the encounters in the updated version.

The plot of this adventure is fairly straightforward (a positive, not a negative. Too often short adventures try to do too much). This adventure starts with recognizable people and places from *Tomb of Annihilation*, and works them into a story with enough depth to allow for serious roleplaying. I find players generally appreciate simpler plots with more complex and interesting encounters, rather than the other way around.

Did you consider making a more complex adventure, or do you prefer to keep things simple?

I kept things simple because of the connection I was making to the Adventurers League module *Putting the Dead to Rest*. In that adventure, I only had two hours of play time to work with, and there was so much more that needed to be told.

Also, adventures get more complicated when incorporating the travel rules as outlined in *Tomb of Annihilation*. Included in *Ruins of Matolo* are rules for overland travel. Random encounters can change the difficulty, as well as the course of the adventure. Incorporating the weather and survival aspects of Chult also adds a bit of risk to traveling for long periods in the jungle. That isn't possible to do in an adventure made to be played in four hours.

Aarakocra necromancer Rhilleg is an interesting villain. Where did you get the idea for him?

Rhilleg was a key concept from the very beginning. I imagined an aarakocra empowered because of his association with Ras Nsi and worship of Dendar the Night Serpent. The Death Curse affects him because of his past poor decisions. This made him less powerful but a trusted ally to Ras Nsi and, by default, Acererak. Necromancy fit as one of his skills because after dying and being raised, he set out on a quest for lichdom.

DESIGN THOUGHT: ADVENTURE PLAY TIME

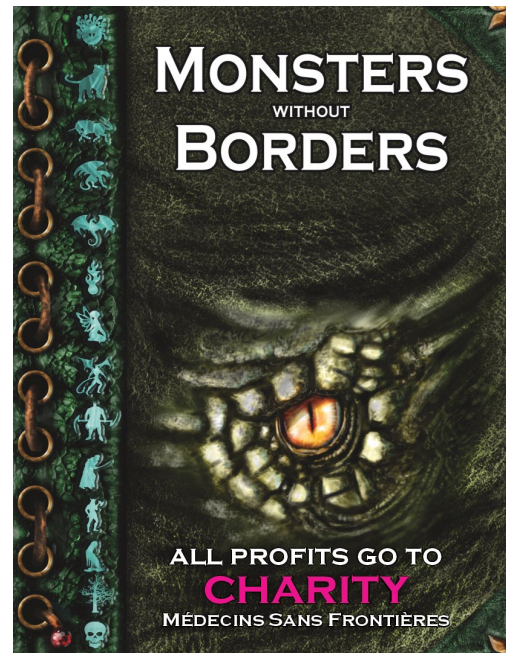
One design concept this discussion brings to light is the difference between writing an adventure to be played in a particular time period, versus one that doesn't factor time. Writing for DMs and players who play at conventions or game days, who expect to finish the adventure in a set period of time, adds many restrictions and complications to the adventure design.

For example, one piece of design that is encouraged when creating a module for Adventurers League play is putting an estimated time on an encounter. How long should a combat take? How long should the DM let a scene involving roleplaying interaction play out? Even if you are not writing an adventure for a time-sensitive environment, it can still be an interesting exercise to estimate how long a designed encounter should take, and then see how close or far you are from that estimate when you run the game yourself.

MONSTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Since D&D is all about cooperation, it's great to see projects that support leading charities such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders). Creator Glen Cooper has worked with this humanitarian aid organization—and a team of top creatives from the DMs Guild—to produce **Monsters Without Borders**.

This pay-what-you-want PDF contains twenty monsters, a paladin oath, two new backgrounds and all author profits go to MSF. “A huge thanks to the team behind *Monsters Without Borders* for their creative fundraising effort for MSF,” said Merlyn Ooms, MSF’s Community & Corporate Manager. “From Yemen to South Sudan, the money raised will go towards delivering essential medical care to those who need it most.”



MSF provides emergency assistance to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, and natural or man-made disasters, without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation. It works in over 70 countries and goes to places others cannot reach or choose not to go.

Download Monsters Without Borders and donate to this worthwhile cause.

[LEARN MORE](#)

OTHER PRODUCTS

Fifty Magical Items for the

Practical Adventurer by Martin Nicholas

Price: \$1.00

This nifty little product contains exactly what the title promises—50 more mundane, but practical, magic items. Our personal favorites are the *bag of colding* (keep your food and drink cold), the *bracelet of wealth* (make people think you're rich), and the *yardstick of extension* (a tape measure!).



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We love these types of products, which can be mined for ideas by DMs. For example, the *tanglefoot arrow* harkens back to the ultra-popular *tanglefoot bag* from third edition D&D (which bursts when thrown to slow creatures with its sticky contents). It's a consumable item the characters can hold on to until just the right moment in their adventures.

[Learn More](#)

Nocturnal Violet City by Alan Capelari

Price: \$1.50

This product contains a variety of content: a description of a dark city and its even darker leader, six new monster stat blocks, a new bard college (College of the Black Widow), a new fighter archetype (Leader of the Troop), and more.

The focus of *Nocturnal Violet City* is, not surprisingly, the city of the

NOCTURNAL VIOLET CITY



A settlement, NPCs, two class options and a short story.

same name, ruled by the dangerous and mysterious Empress Natasha.

[LEARN MORE](#)

(Select to view)

Monsters of the Guild

Price: \$14.95 (PDF), \$19.99 (Fantasy Grounds module), \$29.95 (hardcover print-on-demand book), \$34.95 (book and PDF combo)

Monsters Without Borders (see above) contains a snapshot of creatures from the up and coming mass community project ***Monsters of the Guild***.



“We have represented every type of monster within *Monsters of the Guild*, of the 14 key categories of monsters you get in D&D. We have an adult amethyst dragon, which was given to us by Wolfgang Bauer from **Kobold Press**, and a firefly golem, which is very cool, and was provided by **Elven Tower**,” Cooper says of *Monsters of the Guild*.

“We have people like Tony Petrecca, who has created some excellent adventures on the DMs Guild, spanning right back to when it all kicked off. His adventure *Killer Kobolds* created a whole new set of creatures, such as kobold cavalry riding drakes, and kobold hunters. We have those as well.

“The Infernal Obelisk is my favorite out of all of them. It’s a challenge rating ten fiend which looks like a tall, black obelisk. But it’s got tentacles, crab legs, and it fires rays out of its three eyes. It is incredible.”

[Learn More](#)

DESIGN THOUGHT: STAT BLOCKS

Another suggestion, especially for newer designers, concerns creating a new monster. We suggest starting with an existing stat block, then slowly and carefully diverging from that until you have the creature you want. One example to use as an exercise is the stat block for Empress Natasha from *Nocturnal Violet City*. She has a trait called *poison blood*, which is reproduced here with some minor edits:

Poison Blood. Natasha's blood is poisonous, and anyone touching her blood must make a Constitution saving throw, DC 14. The target is paralyzed for 1d8 + 2 rounds on a fail. Dealing piercing or slashing damage in melee triggers this feature. Additionally, physical contact may trigger this feature if Natasha desires: touching her skin, kissing her, or even inhaling her natural perfume.

The idea behind this trait is evocative: the Empress is poisonous inside and out! With a little tweaking, we can reverse engineer this trait to show how it could develop from existing traits.

First of all, within the game rules we have certain times triggering events can happen. The obvious one is combat: the monster uses its action to cause damage, an effect, or both. So we could give Natasha an attack where her touch does poison damage, as well as paralyzes the target if they fail a saving throw. The ghoul is a famous paralyzing monster, so it's possible to model the attack based on that.

Poison Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6 + 5) poison damage, and the target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

We can also pull out the intriguing concept that attacks on Natasha may cause her blood to spray, damaging nearby creatures. The remorhaz has a similar feature.

Poison Blood. A creature that touches Empress Natasha or hits her with a melee attack while within five feet of her takes 14 (4d6)

poison damage.

Game designer and editor Shawn Merwin's professional work on Dungeons & Dragons has ranged from third to fifth edition, showing up in sourcebooks, adventures, articles, and Organized Play administration. He wrote the Acquisitions Incorporated adventure *Quest for the Bronzbottom Bock*, has created six adventures for the D&D Adventurers League, and manages convention-created content for Baldman Games.

BACK TO TOP



RUINS OF MATOLO

DISCOVERY

by Cindy Moore

D&D
**ADVENTURERS
LEAGUE**

The dead are walking the jungles of Chult. The ruins of Matolo are rumored to be their destination. What has awoken to lure the creatures there? Perhaps it is there where the cure to the curse that plagues Toril can be found. A Dungeons & Dragons adventure for characters of levels 5-10 that takes place in the jungles of Chult.



RUINS OF MATOLO

DISCOVERY

by Cindy Moore



A Dungeon Master's Guild Adept's Adventure

for use with

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Special Thanks: Chris Lindsay and The Guild Adepts

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Matolo of Mistcliff

By Avery Liell-Kok

The Ruins of Matolo is a *Dungeon & Dragons 5th Edition* adventure for **levels 5-10 (Tier 2)**. It is scaled for characters of **5 players of 5th level**.

The adventure takes place in the *Forgotten Realms* Campaign Setting, specifically on the southern island of Chult.

ABOUT THE ADVENTURE

This adventure is meant to supplement *The Tomb of Antihilation* from *Wizards of Coast*. Additional details concerning some elements of this adventure can be found in that book, available in stores September 8, 2017.

This adventure can be easily adapted to be used in just about any other fantasy campaign setting that uses *D&D 5th edition* rules.

Monsters and advisories will appear in **bold** text throughout the adventure and can be found in Appendix A.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Death Curse has arrived! All of Faerun is feeling its effects; increased sightings of the undead, once great heroes wither away, and kings and nobles are unable to bring back their heirs from the dead.

Chult, being the wild land that it is, has been hit hard. The swarms of undead that regularly roam the jungles have swollen in numbers and have become more aggressive.

The surge in undead is because of the arrival of an entity of immense power. Acererak, an archlich that has attempted accession to godhood several times, is again excreting entropy upon the land. He possesses a device called the Soulmonger, an artifact capable of trapping the souls of the dead. These souls are feeding an undead abomination called an atropal, which will transform into an evil god once it has consumed enough souls.

The inhabitants of the city of Port Nyanzaru have put out calls for adventurers to help with the encroaching undead. The characters are called to the villa of Alastar Bol, the leader of the Order of the Gauntlet in Nyanzaru. He needs them to travel to a Gauntlet outpost called Camp Vengeance. They will be bringing supplies and aid in the fight against the undead.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

This adventure has three chapters. They ultimately lead the characters to the Ruins of Matolo.

Chapter 1: The characters meet with Alastar Bol and are hired to travel to Camp Vengeance and give the members of the Order of the Gauntlet aid in their fight against the roaming undead. The characters may be accosted by creatures that hinder their progress.

Chapter 2: The characters arrive at Camp Vengeance to find a battle occurring on the outskirts of the fortified camp with a large group of undead being led by tyrannosaurus rex zombie.

When the battle is over, the characters meet with Ord Firebeard, a captain at the outpost. He tells the characters that Niles Breakbone is missing. He asks them to find the commander.

Chapter 3: Traveling to the location given by the aarokocra, the characters encounter a group of undead and yuan-ti, strange bedfellows indeed.

The characters eventually learn that these creatures and their leader, a rogue aarakocra, are protecting the forgotten temple to Utao located in the ruins. It is unclear why, but they realize that this area is of interest to powerful entities at work on the island.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The following are a couple suggestions on how to get the characters involved.

Alastar's Summons.

The characters are summoned by Alastar Bol to his manse in Port Nyanzaru. He has heard of what they have done in and around Chult and has some matters he wishes to discuss with them.

Rumors in the city.

There have been rumors that the Order of the Gauntlet is having problems in an outpost northwest of Port Nyanzaru. The characters are informed that Alastar Bol is the leader of the Gauntlet in the city. Perhaps he is someone to talk to regarding this matter.

CHAPTER 1: THE ASSIGNMENT

The city of Port Nyanzaru lies on the southern shore of the Bay of Chult. The port city is alive with activity comparable to the great city of Waterdeep. Its buildings are mostly of stone, but are adorned with fabrics of vibrant colors. The sun oppressively beats down on the streets as men, women, and children dress in loose clothing to keep themselves as cool as they can in the jungle heat.

Port Nyanzaru's people are as vibrant as its appearance. The citizens of the city know that visitors are their livelihood. They are friendly but pushy; respectful but persistent; convincing yet cunning. The citizens work hard, but not without having fun as well. The city's favorite pastime is the weekly dinosaur races. Wagers are cast on the outcome of these unusual competitions.

It is in this backdrop that the characters receive a request to meet with Alastar Bol, the leader of the Order of the Gauntlet in the city.

A young boy approaches your group and hands you a sealed envelope. The seal is that of the Order of the Gauntlet. Breaking the seal, you find that it is from Alastar Bol, the leader of the Order in Port Nyanzaru. He requests that you meet with him to discuss some matters with which he needs some assistance. He can be found in a manse in the Merchant's Ward. The boy waits patiently as you

The boy, named Yapa, was instructed to wait for the characters to read the note and escort them to Bol's house. He is very polite and waits for the characters to decide to go to see Bol.

If they don't go right away, Yapa will follow them until they are ready. Use the Port Nyanzaru Random Encounter table in *Tomb of Annihilation* (Appendix B pg. 193). Yapa will mention, "Mr. Bol is awaiting your arrival." This could impede any activities that the characters are engaged in at the time.

Once the group decides to make their way to Alastar, Yapa happily leads them to Bol's manse.

The house of Alastar Bol is modest compared to the villas of the Merchant Princes, yet it is still an impressive home and has its rightful place among those in the Market Ward. A high wrought-iron fence surrounds the house and grounds. At the gate, an armed pair of Order of the Gauntlet members greet Yapa. They quickly usher the lot of you through. Yapa leads you directly into the home, down several corridors and to a sturdy wooden door surrounded by an intricately carved frame.

Yapa knocks on the door using an unusual pattern. A gruff voice from beyond bellows him inside. He bids you to enter before him.

Beyond the door, you see a finely appointed office with a portly man sitting in a stuffed chair next to an open window eating grapes from a fruit bowl.

He looks to your group and says, "I see you have brought the ones I am looking for. Please sit. I need to fill you in. Yapa, can you bring some refreshments?"

SIDEBAR A: Role Playing Alastar Bol

Alastar Bol hates everything about his position in Port Nyanzaru. The last thing he wanted was to be assigned to this dreadfully hot and sticky hell of a city.

Alastar wears loose clothing like most inhabitants of Chult. He rarely wears his armor as he never leaves his home. He looks to provide the Order with a great service to obtain a different post.

Alastar begins to tell them what the situation is that has brought the group here:

- The Order of Gauntlet outpost southwest of the city, Camp Righteous, was attacked by undead and had to be abandoned. The contingent stationed there retreated further south along the River Soshenstar to a fortification they now deem Camp Vengeance.

- They have suffered a great number of casualties. The Order has sent reinforcements, only to get back disease-ridden soldiers begging for treatment.
- The soldiers are suffering from Mad Monkey Fever and Shivering Sickness (details on these afflictions can be found in *Tomb of Annihilation* pg.40). Camp Vengeance is plagued by unusual mists and swarms of insects.
- A merchant boat will be traveling to the camp soon, resupplying them with necessary medicine and food.
- The leader there, Niles Breakbone, is incompetent but was all Bol had. Breakbone has refused all summons Bol has sent.
- Bol asks the characters to go to Camp Vengeance and bring back the “fool”, Breakbone. There are likely things Breakbone needs taken care of before he willingly comes with the characters. Bol asks that they take care of everything that he needs before bringing him back here.
- You will need to find a captain that can lead the remaining “failures” holed up there so the Order maintains a foothold in the jungles.

Alastar asks the group whether they want the job. There is no talk of pay. If asked, he offers each character 50 gp immediately and when the deed is done, he is willing to pay up to 1000 gp. The supply ship is leaving first thing the next morning. An armed escort would be a welcome change for them. The journey will take seven days.

Regardless if the characters agree to Alastar’s terms or not, Delila, one of the Order’s guards, approaches the party on their way out asking them to please check on her brother that has been stationed at Camp Vengeance. Delila tells them her brother is the templar in charge and she is worried that it has become too much for him to handle. She is sure that if the Order showed any confidence in his ability he would be able to cope better. As it is, he is terrified of failure and lacks the confidence in his ability to lead.

Port Nyanzaru has mundane equipment available for resupplying before the trip. Anything in the *Player’s Handbook* is available for standard prices except heavy armor, which is triple the price listed in the book. Special items are also available in the city. See **Sidebar B: Shopping in Port Nyanzaru** for special items available for purchase in the city.

When the group is ready to travel, continue to Chapter 2: Seven Day Cruise.

SIDEBAR B:

Shopping in Port Nyanzaru

Commerce in Port Nyanzaru is tightly controlled by the Merchant Princes. The prices are comparable to that in the *Player’s Handbook*. One exception is heavy armor. It is rare in the city and is triple the price of what is listed in the *Player’s Handbook*.

There are also some location specific items that are available for purchase:

- Canoe 50 gp – holds up to 6 medium creatures and has a maximum speed of 2 mph. Use the rowboat in the *Player’s Handbook* for additional information.
- Insect Repellent (Incense) 1 sp – burns for 8 hours repelling insects in a 20ft. radius. This radius doesn’t protect against giant insects or swarms that are listed in the *Monster Manual* or appendix A of *Tomb of Annihilation*.
- Insect Repellent (Salve) 1 gp – the container has 20 applications. Each application lasts for 24 hours and is waterproof. The salve doesn’t repel giant insects or swarms that are listed in the *Monster Manual* or appendix A in *Tomb of Annihilation*.
- Rain Catchers 1 gp – this device catches 2 gallons of drinking water for every inch of rainfall. It can hold up to 8 gallons of water. It weighs 5 pounds.

CHAPTER 2: SEVEN DAY CRUISE

Travel through the jungles of Chult is difficult if not impossible. Not only must one protect themselves from the beasts that roam the land, but they should be vigilant for insect swarms, strange mists, and dehydration. Torrential downpours can start at any second and then disappear as fast as they come, leaving one soaked to the skin. The characters will need to take precautions traveling to Camp Vengeance.

Travel via the River Soshenstar by boat, takes seven days. Travel up or downstream is the same amount of time as the flow is barely noticeable.

Random Encounters

Along the way there will be creatures and hazards that try and stop them. Checks for random encounters should be made three times per day: one in the morning, another during travel, and once during the evening camp. A result of 16 or higher on a d20 signifies that the characters have a random encounter. Use the table on page 194 of the *Tomb of Annihilation* to determine what the random encounter will be. Also, take note of the suggestions they give to keep the game from getting bogged down with random encounters. When traveling in the jungle, an encounter occurs once a day, negating the need to determine if there is an encounter. Refer to the Jungle Encounters table in *Tomb of Annihilation* (pg. 194, Appendix B) to determine what the adventurers encounter. Use the “no undead” column.

Rainfall

Rain is common on the island of Chult. It is one of the more reliable sources of fresh water. Because of this, it is essential to determine the weather at the start of each day. A roll of 12 or higher on a d20 indicates that 1d4 inches of rain falls that day.

Dehydration

Because of the oppressive heat and humidity of the jungle, dehydration is a real danger for travelers. A character must drink 2 gallons of fresh water each day or be forced to make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. If they fail, they suffer a level of exhaustion. Characters wearing medium or heavy armor make this saving throw at disadvantage.

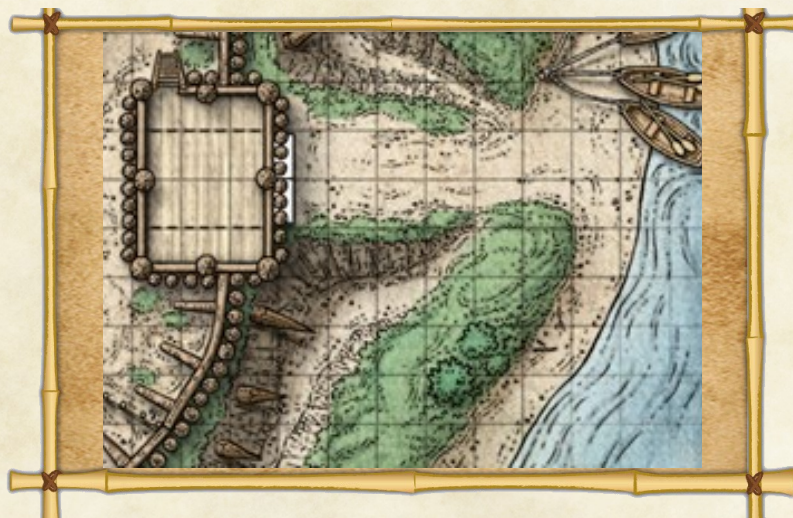
Diseases

The jungles carry many strange things that can make an adventurer sick. These diseases can be debilitating and even deadly if not treated properly, evidenced by the condition of many members of the Order of the Gauntlet from Camp Vengeance. The *Tomb of Annihilation* (pg. 40) goes into detail about the diseases that a character may be infected with while traveling in Chult. Ways of contracting diseases are also covered there.

Approaching Camp Vengeance

The characters arrive at Camp Vengeance in the evening. As they approach, they can see a lot of activity surrounding the camp. Getting closer they can see that a very large creature is attacking the front gate of the fort.

Just about the time you would normally camp for the night, you can see the glow of many torches through the trees. Rounding the bend, Camp Vengeance comes into view. The camp's horn is blowing as a huge creature attacks the front gate. Archers fire down at the enormous attacker, seemingly doing little damage.



The camp is being attacked by a **tyrannosaurus zombie** (pg. 241 *Tomb of Annihilation*). It has been wounded (reduced by 10 hp) by a line of sharpened stakes along the wall of a ditch that surrounds the camp. Still, the creature is not fazed by the injuries and is relentless in its attack. The palisades of the fortification are 12 ft. high. The creature is taller than this wall.

The group starts their turn on the shore. The tyrannosaur turns its attention to the characters once they join the fight. At initiative 0, the archers unleash a volley of arrows, doing 16 (4d8) points of damage to the creature.

CHAPTER 3: TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

With the defeat of the tyrannosaur, the camp comes off high alert and turns its attention to the group of heroes that saved the day.

Soldiers cheer praises of your victory from the top of the fort's wall. Slowly the gates open and a contingent of soldiers meet you at the feet of the defeated goliath.

The ranking member of the group steps forward and addresses the party. "You came just in time! Thank you for your assistance in taking down this beast. Without your help, we may not have successfully defended the camp."

"I am Captain Ord Firebeard. Thank you for escorting the supply boat. Please come inside and take a load off. I am sure it has been a long journey."

Ord offers the characters healing from the clerics inside the installation.

If the characters ask to speak with templar Breakbone, Ord informs them that he has gone on a diplomatic trip to the Mistcliff Mountains. A tribe of aarakocra visited the camp a tenday past asking for an alliance with the Order. They are experiencing the same problems as Camp Vengeance and concluded that teaming up may be of mutual benefit. Breakbone left with the aarakocra five days ago, heading west toward the mountains. He is expected to be away for at least a month. Ord has been left in charge of the camp. Breakbone was accompanied by Captain Perne Salhana and a small portion of her unit. Ord was given the command of Salhana's remaining men.

Breakbone insisted that he be the one to go. He has not been an effective leader at the camp and establishing a formable alliance with the aarakocra would be a feather in his cap. The jungle in that direction is full of countless undead creatures. While this is normal, it has increased substantially in recent months. The aarakocra believe that something is controlling them. Breakbone went to compare notes with the leaders of the tribe in hopes they can create a plan that will make the area safer.

SIDEBAR C:

Population of Camp Vengeance

The current active population of Camp Vengeance is somewhat depleted due to sickness and the excursion taken by templar Niles Breakbone. The commanding officer is Captain Ord Firebeard (**veteran**). Under his command, he has twelve **veterans**, thirty-six **guards**, four **acolytes** under the leadership of Sister Cyas (**priest** of Helm), and ten **tribal warriors** led by Lorsa Bilwatai (**scout**). There are also a group of civilian support workers that inhabit the camp. Among them is a guide by the name of Graedon Margrain (**scout**).

The population fluctuates due to illness and the arrival of reinforcements. These numbers reflect the loss of those Breakbone took with him on mission.

Ord then tells the group the bad news. Breakbone was to send a message via *sending stones* every day to let Ord know of his progress. There hasn't been a message in two days. He is concerned that something has happened.

If the characters tell Ord that they were sent by Alastar Bol to bring Breakbone back to Port Nyanzaru, Ord tells them that Breakbone suspected that would happen soon. It made his decision to take on a harrowing mission easier. He felt proving himself brave and proactive would make him look good in the eyes of his superiors.

Ord pleads with the characters to investigate what has happened to Breakbone and the group that accompanied him.

Ord will give the characters food and lodging for the evening. In the morning, he offers the services of a guide to help the group find their way through the jungle (see **SIDEBAR C** for details on the guide).

CHAPTER 4: TRAIPSING THROUGH THE JUNGLE

Having a guide makes the search for Niles Breakbone easier than if the characters were to attempt to navigate on their own. Graedon Margrain (NG, human, male **scout**) is very familiar with this part of the jungle. He leads the camp's hunters through this territory constantly. Contributing to the ease of tracking is the fact that Breakbone was traveling with a large group that wasn't working to cover their tracks. Twice during the journey, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check is necessary to be able to follow the tracks left by Breakbone and his contingent. Graedon has advantage on this roll. Traveling at a fast pace gives a -5 penalty to the check.

If Graedon loses the trail, the group runs into a random encounter determined by Appendix B in *Tomb of Annihilation*. Use the "no undead" column of that table. This encounter replaces one of the encounters described in this chapter.

As was true of travel along the river, checks should be made to determine the rainfall for that day (see Chapter 2 of this adventure for details). Dehydration is still possible if the proper precautions are not made.

Wild Happenings

In this chapter, the characters try and find Breakbone and his group. They will be traveling for four days. However, for the sake of expediency, Graedon needs to make only two navigation checks. If he succeeds, the group encounters the two points of interest that follow. Otherwise, the trail is lost and a random encounter from *Tomb of Annihilation* (pg. 194, Appendix B) happens instead.

Encounter 1: Veneration

If the characters are not actively trying to stealth through the jungle, the creatures in this encounter are hidden when the group arrives. The creatures have advantage on their stealth roll because of their natural ability to camouflage.

You come across a large statue hidden in the jungle foliage. The statue depicts a humanoid warrior and is made of different types of metal. On the ground surrounding this fixture are baskets of food, flowers, feathers, and many colored stones.

The creatures hiding in the area are a **vegepygmy chief** and five **vegepygmies**. These creatures only wish to leave offerings to the statue they revere as a god. They stay hidden unless a character touches the statue or the gifts that have been left. From the chief's perspective, touching either is desecration and the characters must be punished.

The vegepygmies do not have a language but rather communicate through hisses and gestures. A *speak with plants* spell will allow the caster to communicate with these creatures. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) by the character that casts the spell convinces the creatures that the group means no harm.

Treasure. The vegepygmies have many interesting items hidden in "pockets" in their fungal bodies. This group of them have 1d10 silver pieces and a silver ring covered in mold (5 gp). They also have curious items that they have scavenged in the jungle. Roll three times on the Trinket table in the *Player's Handbook* (pg. 160) to see what they have.



Encounter 2: Sluggish

As the light starts to fade in the dense jungle, the ground beneath you becomes muddy. Ahead, you see two large creatures that resemble snails. The sun, just reaching the horizon, reflects off the shells of these creatures creating a colorful sight. The shell is multihued and is breathtaking to behold. The creatures do not make any hostile action toward you although they are looking directly at you...you think.

The creatures are **flail snails**. The characters start approximately 30 feet from the them. If they come within 10 feet of one of the creatures, it attacks with its *scintillating shell* ability. Otherwise, the group can move past this area and still receive the XP granted by the creatures.

Treasure. The intact shell of a flail snail is worth quite a lot of gold. it can fetch up to 2,500 gp in Port Nyanzaru. Unfortunately, these creatures' shells have sustained significant damage. Because of that, each shell is worth about 600 gp. The shells weigh close to 250 pounds each. If the characters wish to scavenge the shells they must come up with a way to transport them.

The third day of travel is uneventful.



Grim Findings

The following happens at the end of the fourth day.

It is the fourth day of travel with and it is getting more difficult for Graedon to keep on the trail. Many days with rain has washed most of the tracks away. You have stopped frequently so he could find the trail again.

Evening approaches and Graedon suggests that the group set up camp for the night. He goes off to find a safe and dry area. He returns rather quickly and says, "I found something! Come quickly."

Following his lead, you find an abandoned campsite. The tents have been torn to shreds, belongings strewn about, and dead bodies have been left to rot. Many of the bodies wear the livery of the Order of Gauntlet. Others are of creatures whose bodies are so decayed they are unrecognizable. It is obvious at just a quick glance, there was a bloody fight here.

The camp was attacked in the middle of the night. The guard on duty didn't hear the creatures coming. He was quickly overcome and no alarm was given and the entire camp was taken by surprise. Heavily injured, some of the aarakocra tried to fly away but were snatched out of the air by a **quetzalcoatlus**. The attack was made by undead under the control of an aarakocra necromancer named Rhilleg. He rode the quetzalcoatlus that killed the aarakocra trying to flee. He is trying to keep the ruins on the Mistcliff from being discovered by making the jungle dangerous. He hopes that will keep people away.

If the characters choose to investigate the scene, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that there were several creatures that left the scene moving northwest. The dead creatures can be identified as **zombies** with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check by a character that is PROFICIENT in the skill. A DC 20 further identifies them as **greater zombies**.

Most of the tents are destroyed. Their contents are ripped to shreds, some have dead bodies in them, and most have weapons inside. The biggest tent in the camp, Breakbone's, has more damage than the others.

The large tent's frame is somehow still standing despite the fact many sections are broken. Footprints that match those that are around the camp lead in and out of the tent. There are also booted footprints that lead out. No skill check is required to notice the tremendous amount of blood spattered over everything inside. With a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check a character can discern that a body once laid in the mud among the debris.

Breakbone was left for dead in his tent by the creature he fought. Fortunately, he survived. Some of the priests that fled during the fight returned in the morning when they thought it was safe. They tended to Breakbone and some others that survived. Without a means of communication with Camp Vengeance, Breakbone headed back there. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, characters find several booted footprints leading east toward Camp Vengeance.

Once the characters have investigated as much as they would like, Graedon suggests that they make camp as they were going to do before this discovery. While the discussion about camp is taking place one of the characters receives the following message via the *sending* spell.

Breakbone returned to Camp. Was attacked by undead. Aarakocra saw rider on quetzalcoatlus. Attackers headed to Mistcliff. Please find out what is happening up there.

The character can answer with 25 words or less then the spell fades.

Currently, the group has a two-day journey to the top of the Mistcliff Mountains, where Mistcliff is located. Graedon's terrain and guiding expertise ends at the base of the mountains. He will be more than happy to help them further up the mountain, but his advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks ends once they hit the mountains. He does know that there is a trail that leads up the mountain to the Mistcliff.

If in the morning, the characters decide to go to the mountains, proceed to Chapter 4: Matolo.

CHAPTER 4: MATOLO

The two days of travel through the jungle have been the easiest that you've had in the past ten day. The rain has been minimal making the ground solid instead of the mud in the first leg of your journey. You can see the Mistcliff Mountains looming in front of you as you grow ever closer to your destination.

Graedon is true to his word, leading you effortlessly to a path that slowly climbs up the mountains. It looks as if it will take the better part of the day to get to the top.

After a hard climb, you finally reach the top of the Mistcliff Mountains. The humidity of the island causes a mist to form here at the top. A plateau stretches before you, but the mists make it impossible to see how wide it is. Graedon says, "Well Mistcliff is on the other side of this plateau. From what I hear it takes a day to get there. Should we camp or continue?"

If the characters decide to push through and get to the cliff side, they will encounter a patrol of four **zombies**, a **wight**, and a **yuan-ti pureblood** along the way.

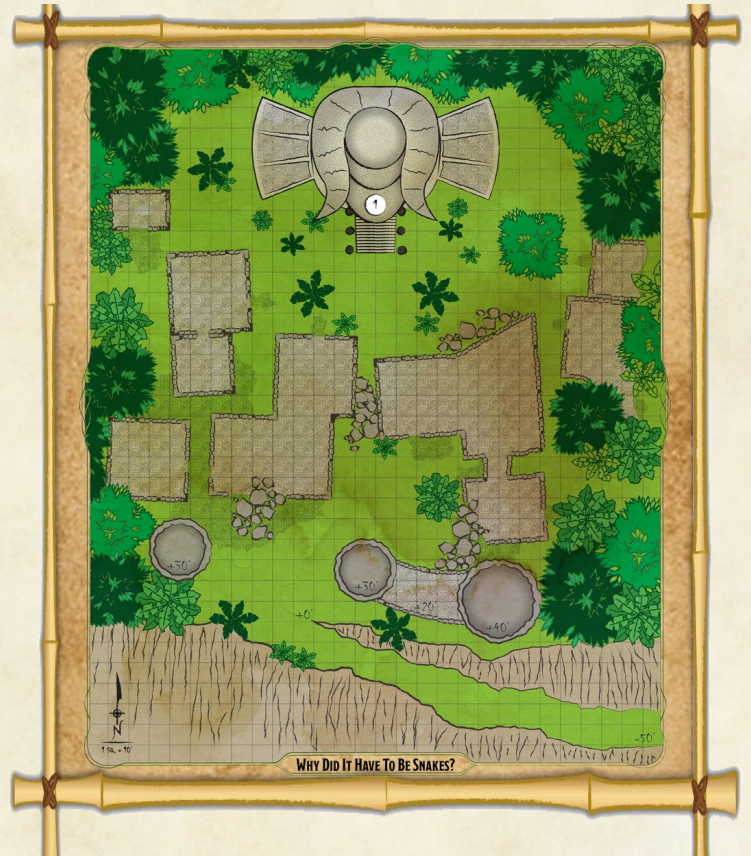
If the characters decide to camp before they cross the plateau, it is possible that they will have one random encounter during the night. If the roll on a d20 is between 16-20 they have a random encounter. Roll on the table in Appendix B of *Tomb of Annihilation* (pg. 194) using the "Mountains" column to determine what the encounter is.

The time that the characters arrive depends on whether they pushed through the night. If they did keep moving, each character must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. Otherwise, they arrive at the Mistcliff during the early evening.

Why Did It Have To Be Snakes!

The jungle on the plateau is not as dense as at lower elevations. The sun shines bright on the mountain top and the mist evaporates ever so slightly. As the sun starts to descend, you can see the outlines of buildings ahead.

The ruins are mostly open to the sun because the jungle hasn't completely swallowed it up yet. There are large copses of trees throughout the city and the cobblestone is broken and cracked. Even at its present state, it is easy to tell that this city was once something to behold.



The buildings are what is left of the City of Matolo. It was the site of a temple to Ubtao, Creator of Chult. Many made the pilgrimage to this temple to pay homage to the patron deity of Chult.

The inhabitants of Chult have for the most part forgotten about Ubtao. Before the Time of Troubles, he was distant from his followers. They believed that he had left Chult when their pleas for help were not answered. The jungle spirits were the inhabitants' replacement for Ubtao. Little do they know, that the jungle spirits are only aspects of Ubtao and he has never left them.

Matolo started to decline when worship of Ubtao died. The Spellplague was what finally destroyed Matolo. The jungle swallowed it and it became a memory.

Currently the buildings are in ruin, the jungle has encroached on the once beautiful city, and nefarious individuals have taken residence among the shattered remains of the home of the Creator of Chult.

The leader of this group has larger reasons for usurping this holy site. Rhilleg, an aarakocra necromancer, has been assigned the task of making sure Ubtao does not regain his power by bringing back his followers. Ras Nsi and he have a plan to beat the Death Curse by pleasing Dendar the Night Serpent and the real villain in this story, Acererak. Keeping Ubtao out of Dendar's way will surely please all the puppeteers on the island of Chult.

Rhilleg has been organizing raids on settlements and hunters in the jungles far below the Mistcliff. He does this primarily to remind the inhabitants that Ubtao is not worthy of their veneration because he has abandoned them. This will keep any remaining worshippers away from this site so that the master plan can be accomplished.

Rhilleg protects the temple with the help of some Yuan-ti, provided by Ras Nsi. The aarakocra has a pet **quetzalcoatlus** that he rides, seeing that his wings are wasting away because of the Death Curse. He is an accomplished necromancer and makes very good use of his ability to animate the dead. He has surrounded himself with fodder for protection inside the temple itself.

Patrolling the ruins are a **yuan-ti broodguard**, a **yuan-ti nightmare speaker**, and a **quetzalcoatlus**.

They are on high alert during the day, as they assume no one will chance moving toward the Mistcliff in the dark. They have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks because of this. If they become aware of the characters the two yuan-ti will attempt to hide and catch them by surprise. The quetzalcoatlus, however, is easy to see. It towers over the buildings and trees.

The temple is the building marked "1". It used to be a large complex, however it has lost many of its walls that connected the different areas together. The creatures are in the area around the temple. The quetzalcoatlus is sitting directly in front of the temple.

Treasure. The yuan-ti have 20 gp, a circlet made of gold and precious gems worth 200 gp, +1 scimitar, and a *Figurine of Wondrous Power (Bronze Griffin)*.

A Trap!

Looking around, you see that although there are many undead roaming around this area, they seem to be for the most part ignoring you. The biggest concentration of creatures is around a group of buildings that are unusually close to one another. As the scene unfolds, a large humanoid steps to the doorway of that cluster of buildings and gazes over the land. All the undead stop and look back. It almost seems like they are communicating.

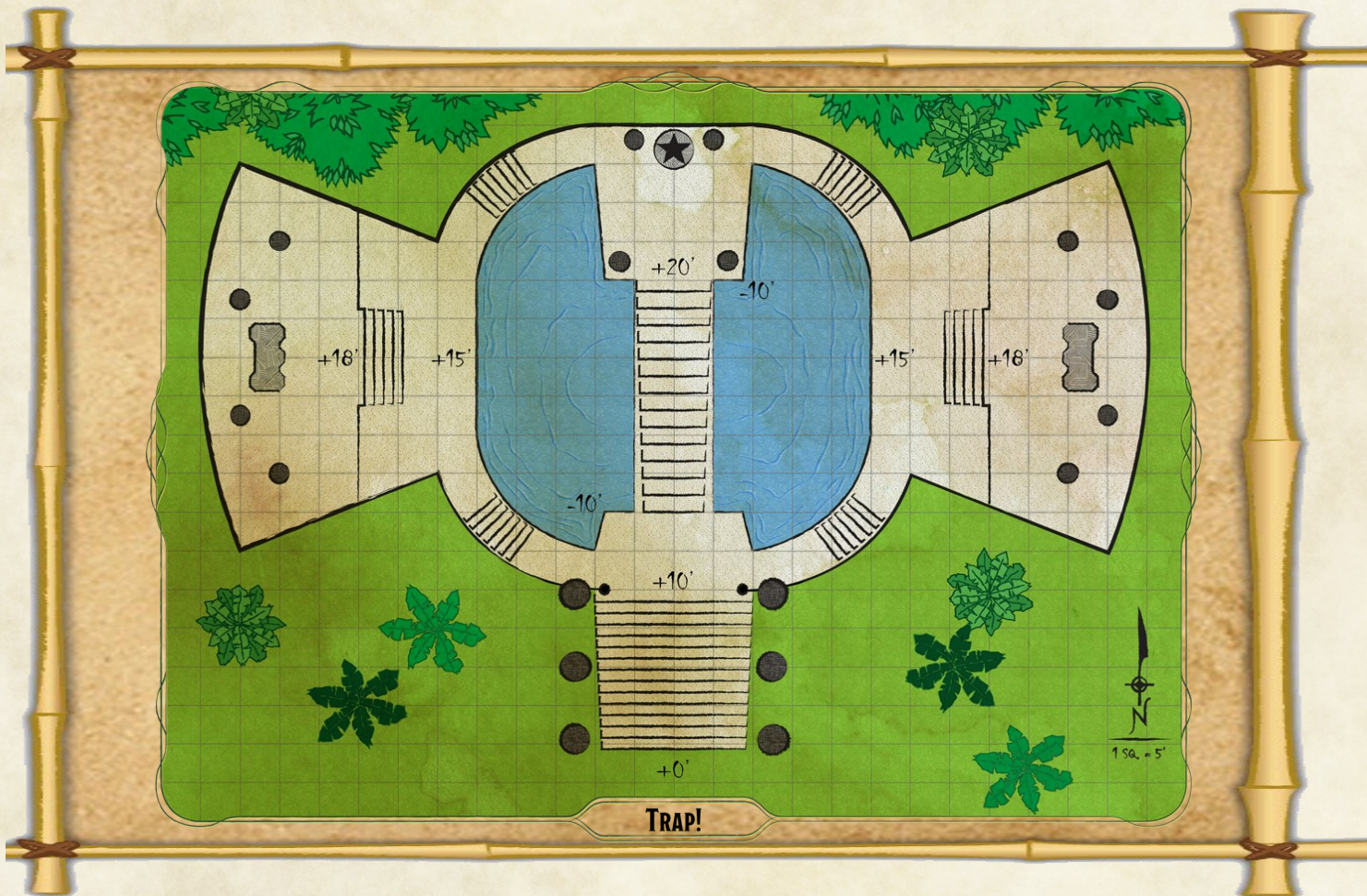
The undead start to disperse. A blood curdling scream comes from inside the building. A scream of such anguish you are unable to tell if it is a man or woman. The screaming stops and it is silent.

Rhilleg waits for the characters to come inside the temple. He realizes that the group doesn't trust what is going on, but when all is silent they will still come.

The creatures will not come out of the temple. If a character makes a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check they get into the temple undetected.

Read this if the characters go into the temple:

At one time this temple may have been a uplifting spiritual place. This is not that time. The walls of this once majestic tribute to Ubtao, is now mostly a pile of rubble. To add to the architectural decay are the splatters of blood and gore strewn about. This once center of faith, is desecrated beyond repair. At the far side of the room stands a creature that fits its current surrounding quite well. A humanoid with a beak, talons on the end of its bird like legs, and human like hands stands hunched over, molting, and featherless before you. Next to him is an undead creature that doesn't look much different than the others that are roaming around. Maybe its taller.



Rhilleg (**aarakocra necromancer**) is inside with a loyal undead servant (**greater zombie**) that will do everything in its power to protect its master.

Rhilleg always keeps dead bodies around to animate when needed. He has three bodies in the temple with him now. They fight to the death. Rhilleg would rather die than tell them why he is doing this.

Treasure. Rhilleg has accumulated quite the cache in his time here. In the corner, under some debris is a wooden chest. Inside is 500 gp, 5 pp, a bronze statue of Ubtao (40 gp), two potions of *greater healing* and a finely carved wooden box containing two jars of a paint, one red the other blue, and a large brush. This is a set of *marvelous pigments*.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

With Rhilleg defeated and a source of the undead incursion revealed, Camp Vengeance and the area next to the Mistcliff Mountains are safer than they were prior.

Niles Breakbone can't thank you enough for what you have done for the Order. He has made arrangement to travel back to Port Nyanzaru to face the consequences of his failure. Ord Firebeard has taken command of the garrison. He will do well.

Alastar Bol delivers well on his promise of reward for bring Breakbone to him. He awards the party 1000 gp for the work they have done.

APPENDIX A: MONSTERS

TYRANNOSAURUS ZOMBIE

Huge undead, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 136 (13d12 + 52)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	6 (-2)	19 (+4)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	5 (-3)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 6

Languages —

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Disgorge Zombie. As a bonus action the tyrannosaurus zombie can disgorge a normal **zombie**, which appears in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of it. The disgorged zombie acts on its own initiative count. After a zombie is disgorged, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, the tyrannosaurus zombie runs out of zombies to disgorge and loses that trait. If the tyrannosaurus zombie still has this trait when it dies, 1d4 normal **zombies** erupt from its corpse at the start of the next turn. These zombies act on their own initiative count.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the tyrannosaurus zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the tyrannosaurus zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The tyrannosaurus zombie makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail. It can't make both attacks against the same target.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 33 (4d12 + 7) piercing damage. If the target is a medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 17). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and the tyrannosaurus zombie can't bite another target or disgorge zombies.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

ZOMBIE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands the languages it knew on life but can't speak.

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

VEGEPYGMY CHEIF

Small plant, neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d6 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances lightning, piercing

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Vegepygmy

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Plant Camouflage. The vegepygmy has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks it makes in any terrain with ample obscuring plant life.

Regeneration. The vegepygmy regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes cold, fire. Or necrotic damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vegepygmy's next turn. The vegepygmy dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The vegepygmy makes two attacks with its claws or two melee attacks with its spear.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Spores (1/Day). A 15-foot-radius cloud of toxic spores extends out from the vegepygmy. The spores spread around corners. Each creature in the area that isn't a plant must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. While poisoned in this way, a target takes 9 (2d8) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a success.

VEGEPYGMY

Small plant, neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 9 (2d6 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances lightning, piercing

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Vegepygmy

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Plant Camouflage. The vegepygmy has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks it makes in any terrain with ample obscuring plant life.

Regeneration. The vegepygmy regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes cold, fire. Or necrotic damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vegepygmy's next turn. The vegepygmy dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Sling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Flail Snail

Large elemental, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (5d10 + 25)

Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	5 (-3)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Antimagic Shell. The snail has advantage on saving throws against spell, and any creature making a spell attack against the snail has disadvantage on the attack roll. If the snail succeeds on the saving throw against a spell or a spell attack misses it, an additional effect might occur, as determined by rolling a d6:

1-2. If the spell affects an area or has multiple targets, it fails and has no effect. If the spell targets only one snail, it has no effect on the snail and is reflected back at the caster, using the spell slot level, spell save DC, attack bonus, and spellcasting ability of the caster.

3-4. No additional effect.

5-6. The snail's shell converts some of the spell's energy into a burst of destructive force. Each creature within 30 feet of the snail must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 1d6 force damage per level of the spell on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Flail Tentacles. The flail snail has five flail tentacles. Whenever the snail takes 10 damage or more on a single turn, one of its tentacles dies. If even one tentacle remains, the snail regrows all dead ones within 1d4 days. If all tentacles die, the snail retracts into its shell, gaining total cover, and it begins wailing, a sound that can be heard for 600 feet, stopping only when it dies 5d6 minutes later. Healing magic that restores limbs, such as the *regenerate* spell, can halt the dying process.

Actions

Multiattack. The flail snail makes as many Flail Tentacle attacks as it has flail tentacles, all against the same target.

Flail Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Scintillating Shell (Recharges after Short or Long rest). The snail's shell emit dazzling colored light until the end of the snail's next turn. During this time, the shell sheds bright light in a 30-foot-radius and dim for an additional 30 feet, and creatures that can see the snail have disadvantage on attack rolls against it. In

addition, any creature that within the bright light and able to see the snail when this power is activated must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the light ends.

Shell Defense. The flail snail withdraws into its shell, gaining a +4 bonus to AC until it emerges. It can emerge from its shell as a bonus action on its turn.

WIGHT

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the wight has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The wight makes two longsword attacks or two longbow attacks. It can use its Life Drain in place of one longsword attack.

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

A humanoid slain by this attack rises 24 hours later as a zombie under the wight's control, unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed. The wight can have no more than twelve zombies under its control at one time.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

YUAN-TI PUREBLOOD

Medium humanoid (yuan-ti), neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 40 (9d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +6, Perception +3, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The yuan-ti's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). The yuan-ti can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *animal friendship* (snakes only)

3/day each: *poison spray*, *suggestion*

Magic Resistance. The yuan-ti has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The yuan-ti makes two melee attacks.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

QUETZALCOATLUS

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 30 (4d12 + 4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dive Attack. If the quetzalcoatlus is flying and dives at least 30 feet toward a target and then hits with a bite attack, the attack deals an extra 10 (3d6) points of damage to the target.

Flyby. The quetzalcoatlus doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 12 (3d6 + 2) piercing damage.

YUAN-TI BROODGUARD

Medium humanoid (yuan-ti). neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	4 (-3)

Saving Throws Str +4, Dex +4, Wis +2

Skills Perception +2

Damage immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Mental Resistance. The broodguard has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't paralyze it.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the broodguard can gain advantage on all weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The yuan-ti makes three melee attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

YUAN-TI NIGHTMARE SPEAKER

Medium humanoid (shapechanger, yuan-ti). neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 71 (13d8 + 13)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +5

Skills Deception +5, Stealth +4

Damage immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft. (penetrates magical darkness), passive Perception 11

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Shapechanger. The yuan-ti can use its action to polymorph into a Medium snake, or back into its true form. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It doesn't change form if it dies.

Death Fangs (2/day). The first time the yuan-ti hits with a melee attack on its turn, it can deal an extra 16 (3d10) necrotic damage.

Innate Spellcasting (Yuan-ti form only). The yuan-ti's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). The yuan-ti can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *animal friendship* (snakes only)

3/day: *suggestion*

Magic Resistance. The yuan-ti has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting (Yuan-ti form only). The yuan-ti's is a 6th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It regains its expended spell slots when it finishes a short or long rest. It knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *eldritch blast* (range 300 ft., +3 bonus to each damage roll), *mage hand*, *message*, *poison spray*, *prestidigitation*

1st–3rd level (2 3rd –level slots): *arms of Hadar*, *darkness*, *fear*, *hex*, *hold person*, *hunger of Hadar*, *witch bolt*

Actions

Multiattack. The yuan-ti makes one constrict attack and one scimitar attack.

Scimitar (Yuan-ti form only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) slashing damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6+3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14) if it is a Large or smaller creature. Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the yuan-ti can't constrict another target.

Invoke Nightmare (Recharges after a Short or long Rest). The yuan-ti taps into the nightmares of a creature it can see within 60 feet of it and creates an illusory, immobile manifestation of the creature's deepest fears, visible only to that creature. The target must make a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 11 (2d10) psychic damage and it is frightened of the manifestation, believing it to be real. The yuan-ti must concentrate to maintain the illusion (as if concentrating on a spell), which lasts for up to 1 minute and can't be harmed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the illusion on a success, or taking 11 (2d10) psychic damage on a failure.

RHILLEG

AARAKOCRA NECROMANCER

Rhilleg was once a proud member of the Aarakocra tribe that inhabits The Mistcliff. He is the youngest son of the chieftain, and was the Wing of the Hunt; the title given to the leader of those responsible for providing food for the tribe.

Rhilleg was a good commander and led his team on many successful hunts. He was well liked because he continually taught the others tricks that would make them better hunters. He served as a mentor for many of the young aarakocra looking to become a productive part of the tribe. Then tragedy struck while the group was out on a hunt.

Rhilleg was leading an expedition in a region of the jungle rarely hunted by the team, as reports of ferocious predators kept most humanoids out of the area. Rhilleg often made bold choices like these to keep the tribe abundant in food. Unfortunately for him it was a trap set by a group of pterafolk, the aarakocra's natural enemy.

Rhilleg was slain when the group was ambushed by the pterafolk. The surviving aarakocra were able to return his body to his family. The Chieftain, grief stricken, declared war on the pterafolk.

The tribal shaman successfully performed a ritual to raise Rhilleg from the dead. He changed, however, because of his experience and refocused his effort into learning the arcane arts. Fascinated with death, he specialized in Necromancy. This fascination turned dark quickly, as Rhilleg began to animate the dead bodies of the fallen and turn them against his enemies. Now lacking the compassion and honor of the tribe he belonged to, his father banished Rhilleg from his home.

As the Death Curse started to sweep over Chult, Rhilleg started to waste away like all the others that had been raised from death. He met Ras Nsi, another affected by the curse, and the two of them collaborated to find a way to recover from this affliction. Together they work to ensure Acererak succeeds in his plans so they may have life everlasting.

Rhilleg has been assigned to the Ruins of Matolo. Here he is to secure the area and make certain that the few remaining worshipers of Ubtao do not enter the temple. Ubtao has been missing from the island of Chult for a very long time. Acererak wishes to remain operating in secret on the island; without a petty god interfering.



RHILLEG AARAKOCRA NECROMANCER

Medium humanoid (aarakocra), neutral evil

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 100 (3d8)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16(+3)	12(+1)	9(-1)

Saving Throws Int +6 Dex +5
Skills Perception +6, Arcana +5,
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Auran
Challenge 4 (1100 XP)

Spellcasting. Rhilleg is a 5th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is intelligence (Spell save DC 15, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Rhilleg has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *dancing lights*, *mage hand*, *mending*
1st level (4 slots): *false life**, *mage armor*, *ray of sickness**
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness**, *ray of enfeeblement**,
web
3rd level (2 slots): *animate dead**, *bestow curse**, *vampiric touch**

Actions

Talon. *Melee Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage

Withering Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) necrotic damage.

GREATER ZOMBIE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	4 (-3)	6 (-2)	5 (-2)

Saving Throws Wis +1

Damage Resistances cold, necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands the languages it knew on life but can't speak.

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Turn Resistance. The zombie has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

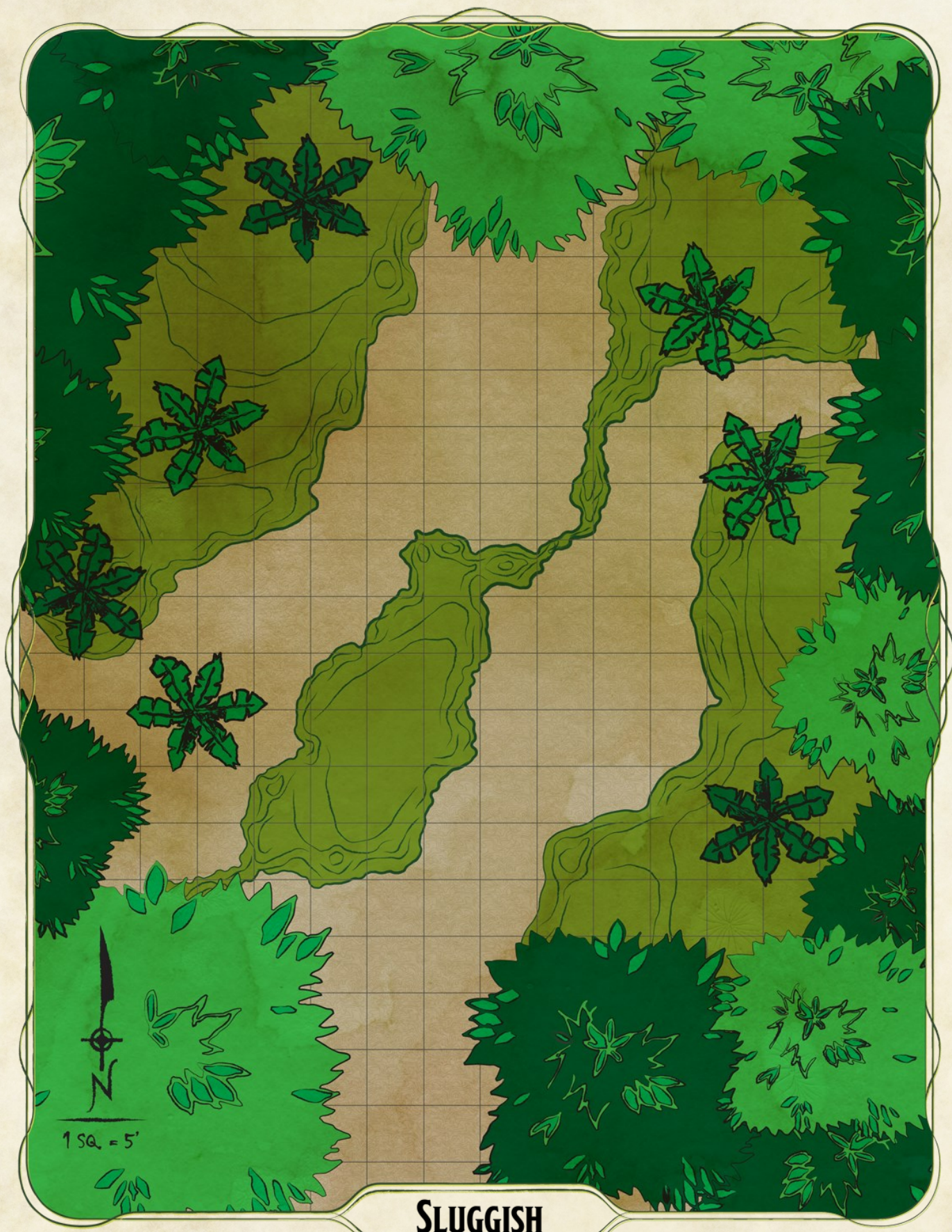
Actions

Multiattack. The zombie makes two melee attacks.

Empowered Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) necrotic damage..

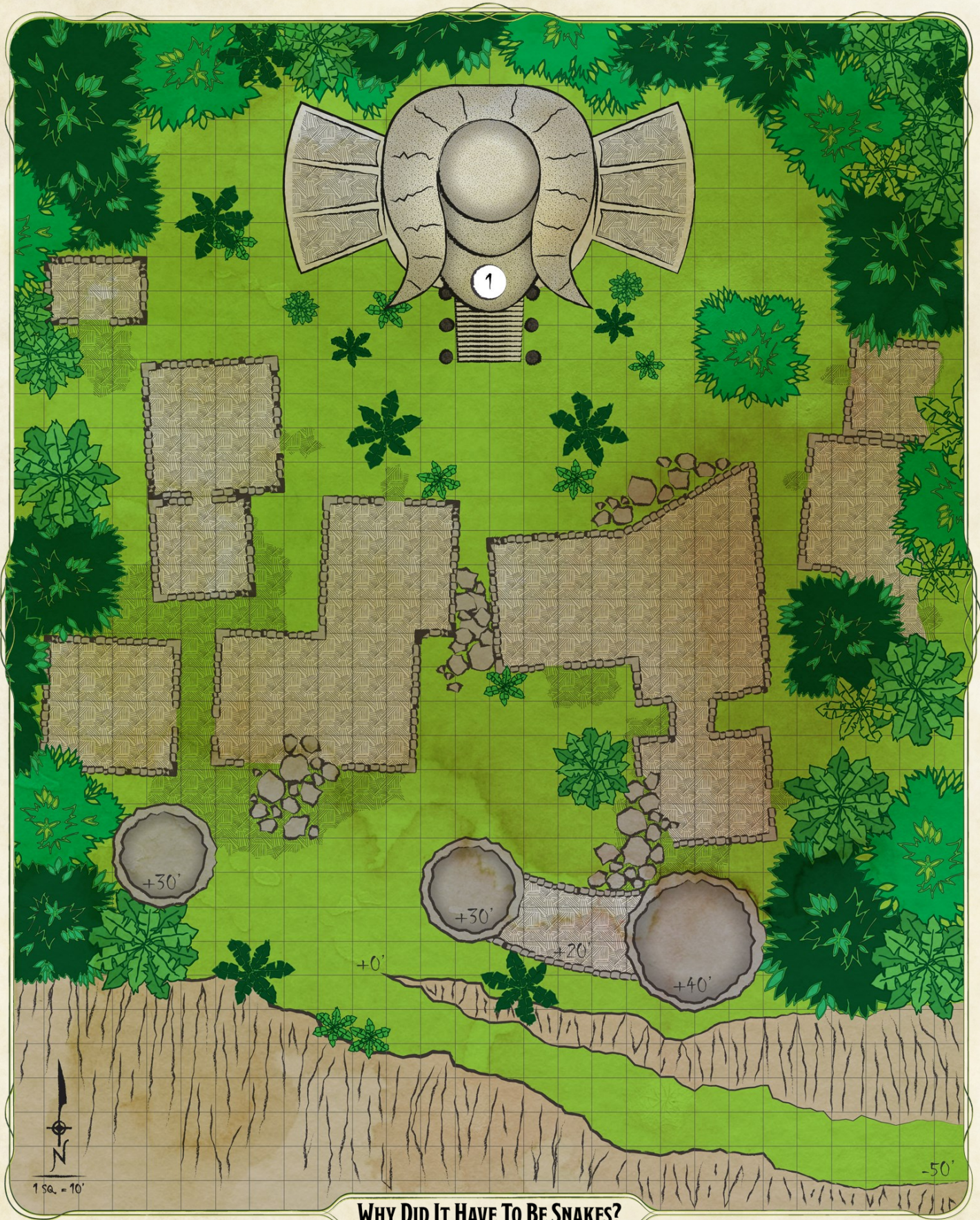
APPENDIX A: MAPS



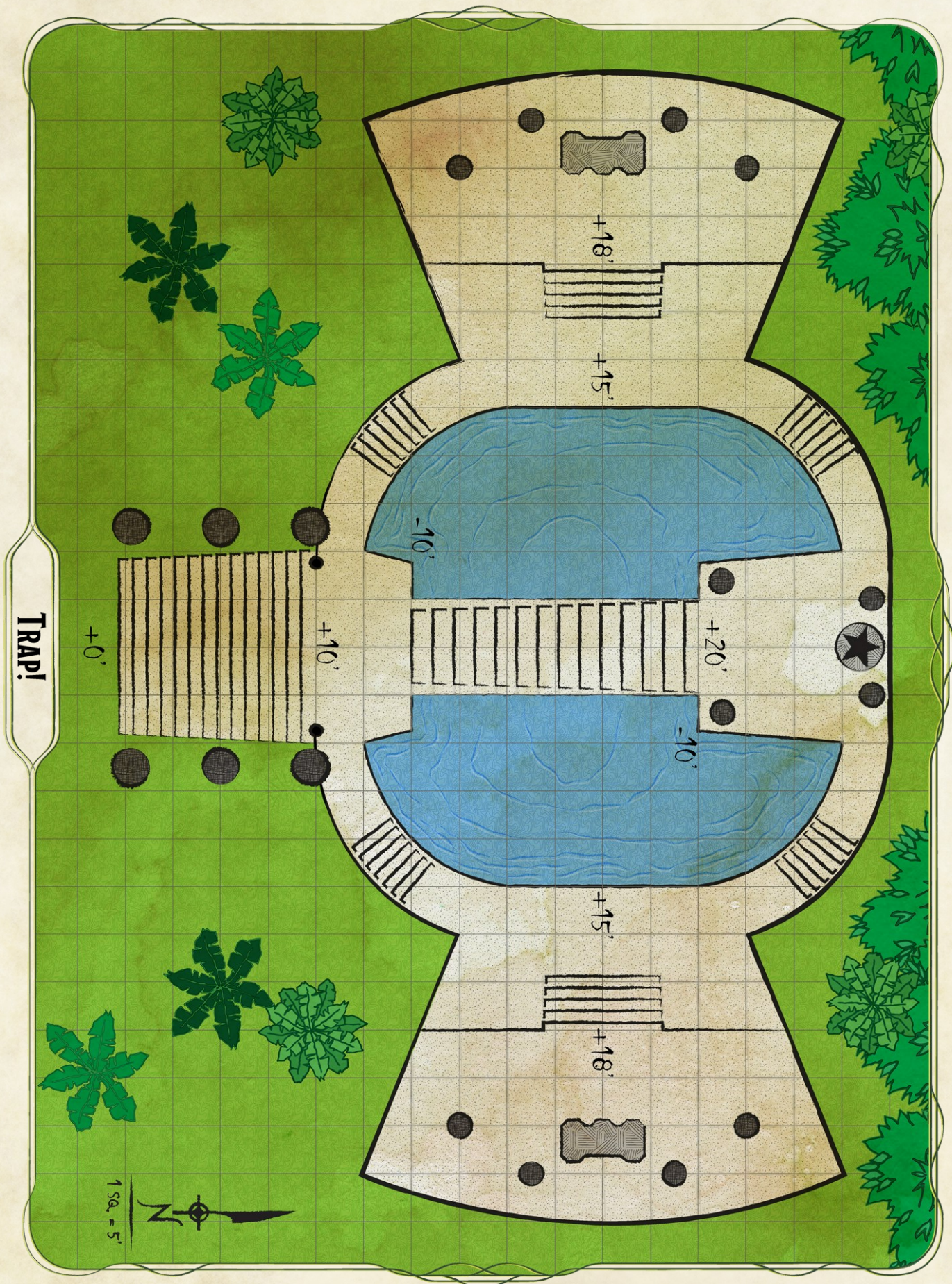


SLUGGISH





WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES?



RUINS OF MATOLO

DISCOVERY

by Cindy Moore



A Dungeon Master's Guild Adept's Adventure

for use with

TOMB OF ANNIHILATION

The dead are walking the jungles of Chult. The ruins of Matolo are rumored to be their destination. What has awoken to lure the creatures there? Perhaps it is there where the cure to the curse that plagues Toril can be found. A Dungeons & Dragons adventure for characters of levels 5-10 that takes place in the jungles of Chult..



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Dragon Classic

From the Dragon archives, we look back at the gith... both -yanki and -zerai!

This issue, we've been previewing *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*—including the monstrous contestants in our most recent D&D Creature Competition (**Mordenkainen's Mayhem**). Among these? Githyanki vs. githzerai. After all, *Mordenkainen* reveals secrets from the conflicts of the multiverse... among them, the longstanding conflict between the gith.

From *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* (pg. 85):

The story of the gith is rooted in a cruel twist of cosmic fate. Inspired by the great leader for whom the race is named, the gith rose up to overthrow the mind flayers that held them in servitude. But after they won their freedom, two factions among the gith disagreed on what kind of civilization they would forge. That disagreement quickly flared into open hostility, and the two groups distanced themselves from one another to pursue their separate agendas. They remain bitter enemies today, each side willing to fight to the death whenever they cross paths.

The githyanki were motivated by revenge and convinced that they deserved to take whatever they wanted from the worlds they traveled. Ranging out from the titanic city of Tu'narath on the Astral Plane, they dispatch raiders to plunder the Material Plane and other worlds,

bringing treasures and slaves back to their ageless realm. At the same time, they hunt down and kill mind flayers whenever possible, as recompense for what the illithids did to them.

The githzerai believed that the path to an enlightened civilization lay in seclusion, not conflict. Their dedication to the principles of order is so strong that they can manipulate the stuff of chaos and use it to their benefit; thus, they have carved out a stronghold for themselves on the plane of Limbo that is virtually impervious. Though the githzerai are pacifists by nature, they share the githyanki's racial hatred for mind flayers, and from time to time they send out squads to destroy illithid outposts.

If the two races were ever to team up against the illithids, a combined force of gith could conceivably tip the balance in their favor. But as long as the githyanki and githzerai stay at each other's throats, their goal of ultimate victory over their original common enemy will likely remain unachieved.

Githyanki/githzerai have been part of the game since award-winning author Charles Stross created them for his D&D campaign (an account of which can be read at [Unbound Worlds](#)), later appearing in 1981's *Fiend Folio*—gracing its very cover, in fact.

As for the gith's other early appearances? Let's look back through the pages of *Dragon* (and *Dungeon*) magazine!

FEDIFENSOR

Appearing in *Dragon* #68 (November 1982), this AD&D adventure concerns the search for a missing magic sword. Taken from its temple home, the sword made its way to the Astral Plane where it came into the possession of a githyanki outpost:

“Now the clerics of Amphabese are searching far and wide for a band of adventurers dedicated to the cause of good who will risk a journey into the Astral Plane to recover *Fedifensor*—and they seem to have found a group of likely heroes in the player characters who have just accepted the task.”

As for the sword itself: unless you're of lawful good alignment, it cannot be touched at all. In the hands of a lawful good non-paladin, it

serves as an intelligent +2 bastard sword. And in the hands of a paladin? When unsheathed, Fedifensor will immediately begin to glow bright red, as if just drawn from a forge furnace, and functions as a +5 weapon with a host of other abilities!

As a bonus to this issue, we've recreated this magic sword to include in your game!

[Download Fedifensor](#)

[Download The Sword Recreated](#)

HOUNDS OF SPACE AND DARKNESS

Dragon #117 (November 1986) brought us three unusual dogs for AD&D, including the gith dogs:

“In the years immediately following their emancipation from the illithids, or mind flayers, the followers of Gith (the githyanki and githzerai) acquired dogs from the Prime Material Plane.... The object of this project was to produce a breed of dog that would serve in a war of extermination on the illithid race. Great importance was attached to the production of these dogs, so much so that when the githyanki/githzerai split came, some called it the War of Dogs.”

[Download Hounds](#)

LICH QUEEN'S BELOVED

Perhaps the most famous outing against the gith came with Chris Perkins' original adventure for *Dungeon* #100 (July 2003), later updated by Rodney Thompson for *Dungeon* #191 (June 2011):

“Vlaakith CLVII, the reigning sovereign of the githyanki race, is the

legitimate descendant of the original Vlaakith, and her word is law.... In this adventure, the heroes invade Susurrus, the palace of the githyanki lich-queen, and attempt to end Vlaakith's reign for-ever. The adventure begins when Zetch'r'r, a githyanki warlord, petitions the heroes to confront and destroy Vlaakith. However, the lich-queen's spies know of Zetch'r'r's treachery and are preparing to deal with him and the PCs."

The entirety of the *Lich Queen's Beloved* is still available at the DMs Guild. For excerpt purposes, we wanted to offer Rodney's full article on adapting the adventure for various editions, as well as a look at Vlaakith herself (that is, the 157th incarnation!).

And finally, we've included a recreation of Vlaakith for fifth edition should she ever be encountered in your campaigns!

[Download Adapting the *Lich Queen's Beloved*](#)

[Download Vlaakith \(original\)](#)

[Download Vlaakith \(updated\)](#)

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FEDIFENSOR

by Allen Rogers

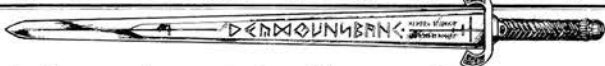
An AD&D™
scenario for
6-8 characters,
levels 7 and up

INTRODUCTION

In days not long past, the steeples of the temple of Amphabese reached proudly into the sky, and the temple was a bastion of goodness and justice. The order of Amphabese, its clerics, and the others who swore allegiance to it were revered throughout the land for their work in spreading and defending the principles of law and good. Many a young paladin took his vows at the altar of Amphabese, many a group of brave and righteous adventurers received the blessings of the temple before setting out to combat evil. As much as the temple of Amphabese was respected and loved by those who benefited from its efforts, so was it feared and hated by the leaders of evil and their minions.

At the time of the temple's greatest trial, the high priest of Amphabese was a cleric named Astramal, acknowledged by his brothers as the most devoted of them all. One

FEDIFENSOR



night Astramal was awakened by a terrible dream — a nightmare that he took to be a vision of the future. In his dream, he saw the temple and all its grounds desecrated and destroyed, and superimposed on the scene of carnage was the gloating face of a powerful demon. Astramal saw the dream as a message from his deity, the god's way of warning the temple that its fate — or one of its possible fates — was to be overrun by the forces of evil and chaos.

The high priest meditated and prayed for guidance all the next day, but received no inspiration. Then he slept, and he had a second vision. In this dream Astramal saw himself — but as an elderly person, a man years older than the priest was at present. Astramal was in conference with a tall, strong warrior dressed in silver and white — a paladin. Cradled in the arms of the high priest was a large, finely crafted sword which Astramal presented to the warrior. That scene faded, to be replaced by the sight of a battle between the paladin and a demon. Because of the power in the special sword, the paladin was an easy victor; the demon was destroyed, and the good warrior stood alone, his sword raised high and his head down in prayer.

Now, thought Astramal, he knew enough to embark upon a course of action. The first thing he needed to do was acquire a great sword like the one he had envisioned, and for this he went to enlist the aid of a secluded band of gray elves who lived to the east. The elves respected the temple of Amphabese, and they appreciated the temple's location, between their enclave and the nations of evil which lay to the west, across the sea. Astramal conferred with the leaders of the faerie tribe and convinced them that his dreams were indeed visions of a foreboding future. The elves, impressed with the seriousness of this apparent threat — not only to the temple, but to the elves' continued existence — agreed that they would craft a sword of highest quality and enchant it with the most powerful abilities their wizards could conjure up.

Astramal returned to the temple and told his anxious brothers to go about their usual tasks. The elves' work would take weeks, perhaps months, to complete, and the priest's second vision had suggested to him that it would be years before he would encounter the paladin who would later vanquish the demon.

As it turned out, more than three years came and went before Astramal heard from the elves again. Many times he was on the verge of setting out for the elves' enclave again, to see what had happened, even at the risk of annoying the faerie folk. He worried more and more; his hair became more silvery, his brow more furrowed, and he began to look like the old man in his second vision. He prayed for enlightenment, and was rewarded with the wisdom and willpower to wait faithfully. Then, one day the sentries at the temple gate were accosted by an entourage of gray elves seeking an audience with Astramal. The high priest received them at once, and was promptly presented with the awesome result of the elves' efforts: a mighty, magical sword the elves called Fedifensor, or "Defender of the Faith."

The master smith who forged the blade was in the traveling party to make the presentation himself. "This is my greatest creation," he told Astramal. "It is a weapon so endowed with goodness that even the greatest of demons must flinch at its gleam. And it can only be wielded by a truly righteous hand."

Astramal accepted the sword and its scabbard with gratitude and humility. "I will treasure this gift for as long as I am alive and as long as the temple of Amphabese stands. Its use will only be entrusted to the most worthy warrior in the land — and I will place the welfare of the sword above my own safety if that choice ever needs be made."

The services of thanksgiving went on at the temple for several days after the elves had departed. Then Astramal and the elders set about deciding who should be entrusted with the sword.

They tested a list of candidates, made up of all the paladins who regularly visited the temple to renew their vows, and settled on one Boyd De Thalion, generally acknowledged as the most righteous and most powerful warrior in the land. Astramal presented the sword to Boyd, in a ceremony that looked very much like what he remembered from his dream, and the paladin took up residence at the temple to await the time when he and Fedifensor would be called upon.

For months thereafter, no one visited the temple whose virtue and skill could compare with Boyd De Thalion's. Then a warrior appeared who seemed Boyd's equal in many ways. He called himself Karl, and he might have done very well in the tests — except that the first test was to meet Boyd himself.

As soon as Karl entered the chamber where the champion waited, Boyd drew Fedifensor from its sheath. The sword's blade turned fiery red, and Karl's true nature was revealed: The challenger for Boyd's position was a demon — one that looked like the very demon Astramal had seen in his first dream. Its ruse destroyed, the demon dropped all pretense and attacked the paladin. After a vicious battle, Boyd slew the demon with his sword and cast its material body back from whence it came.

Thus, the second part of Astramal's dream-prophecy had come true. But what of the first dream? Was the temple still vulnerable to a threat that would breach its walls and tumble its towers? Astramal and the clerics could not be sure the threat was over, and they and their champion remained vigilant.

The answer to their questions finally came, in the form of an invasion of evil hordes from across the sea. Where a single powerful demon had failed, thousands of lesser creatures seemed more likely to succeed. The invading force overran everything in its way and advanced inland, cutting a swath of terror with the temple directly in its path.

The assault on the temple, when it came, was not a surprise. But that fact did not lessen its severity: hundreds of fighters on both sides perished in the courtyard within the first minutes of battle — and one of the fallen was Boyd De Thalion. The champion waded into the thick of the fight, wielding Fedifensor with dedication and confidence. But as powerful as it was, the sword could not stem the tide of onrushing bodies that descended on the champion. The foes who delivered Boyd's death blows were filled with bloodlust, not greed, and so they ignored the gleaming sword that fell by his side. Astramal, however, did not.

In the confusion of battle, while the defenders of the temple were slowly beating back the invaders, the high priest scurried from his hiding place into the courtyard and managed to retrieve Fedifensor and its scabbard. He slipped the sheath around the blade and carried the weapon into the temple through a secret entrance. Huddled in a secluded tunnel, with the sounds of battle still somewhat distant, Astramal began to chant a spell which would carry his spirit, and the sword, far from the carnage. The magic worked; Astramal's essence passed into the Astral Plane, carrying the blade along. If the temple fell, thought Astramal in his last moment of physical existence, at least Fedifensor would not be a looter's prize, to spend the rest of its existence locked away in some evil creature's treasure hoard.

Thus did Astramal keep his promise to the elves — at the cost of his own life. The priest's material body perished soon thereafter, in a fire that gutted part of the temple — and Astramal's essence in the Astral Plane died at the same time, leaving Fedifensor floating in the void.

The temple did not fall, although the ranks of the forces of good were severely decimated before all the evil creatures were fought off. The clerics and warriors who survived the fight — including some who had seen Astramal enter the secret passage with the sword — realized what the priest had done, and what had happened to Fedifensor, when they discovered Astramal's body without the sword nearby.

Now the clerics of Amphabese are searching far and wide for a band of adventurers dedicated to the cause of good who will risk a journey into the Astral Plane to recover Fedifensor — and they seem to have found a group of likely heroes in the player characters who have just accepted the task.

Note: All of the following is for the DM's use only and should not be known by players before the adventure begins.

FEDIFENSOR

The magic sword which is the object of this adventure has the following powers:

In the hands of a non-paladin of lawful good alignment, Fedifensor is a +2 bastard sword. It has an intelligence of 17, an ego of 18, and (of course) is aligned lawful good. It cannot be touched or carried by anyone of another alignment unless the blade is sheathed in its special scabbard.

In the hands of a paladin, Fedifensor is a +5 weapon and also exhibits these other abilities: 1) Magic resistance of 50% in a radius of 5 feet; 2) Dispel magic can be cast upon any spell cast on the sword or its wielder whenever the paladin desires, at a level of spell use equal to the experience level of the wielder; 3) At a range of 1"/level of the paladin, the sword can detect the presence of major evil entities (demons, devils, undead, or any evil creature that can only be hit by a magic weapon). If the blade is unsheathed, it will immediately begin to glow bright red, as if just drawn from a forge furnace; and 4) it inflicts an additional point of damage (beyond the usual +5) for each experience level of the wielder when used against a demon.

When Astramal's essence on the Astral Plane ceased to exist, Fedifensor was cast loose into the void. During the time it took the clerics of Amphabese to gain the aid of a rescue party, a small group of githyanki warriors (see the FIEND FOLIO™ Tome) came upon the sword in its scabbard. They perceived the blade to be magical, although they don't realize the full extent of its powers, and traveled with it back to their outpost, where they deposited it for safekeeping.

GETTING TO AND FROM THE ASTRAL PLANE

There are many ways of reaching the Astral Plane and returning to the Prime Material. The method the party uses will have a great effect on the adventure as events move along, and the DM must moderate the adventurers' actions accordingly. If the party does not possess an appropriate magic item or the necessary spell-casting ability to enter the plane, it could be arranged for one of the clerics of Amphabese to cast a spell on behalf of the group, and (depending on the method used) the cleric may or may not accompany the party into the plane. If the DM needs or wants to employ such a cleric as an NPC, the character's ability scores and spell capabilities should be predetermined.

ENCOUNTERS

Because this adventure is a search-and-recovery mission rather than a "simple" journey through the Astral Plane, encounters will occur relatively often. Check for a random encounter once every 4 hours by rolling d4, with a result of "1" indicating an encounter. The following table is suggested as a list of possible encounters and their frequencies; the DM can easily alter most sections of it to suit his or her preference.

The passage of time between encounters, when search movement is being conducted, has little meaning to player characters while they are on the Astral Plane. However, the DM must keep a careful record of elapsed time so that activities going on in the Prime Material Plane at the same time can be properly moderated.

Encounter Table

d& roll	Encounter type	Number (notes)
01-20	Githyanki Outpost	1 (see following)
21-23	Aerial servant	1
24	Demon, major	1
25-26	Demon, minor	1-3
27	Demon, prince	1
28	Devil, arch-	1
29	Devil, greater	1
30-32	Devil, lesser	1-3
33-52	Githyanki	1-4
53-55	Intellect devourer	1-2
56-60	Invisible stalker	1-3

61-65	Ki-rin	1
66-70	Night hag	1-4
71-74	Nightmare	1-4
75-79	Rakshasa	1-3
80-83	Shedu	2-5
84	Titan, elder	1
85-87	Titan, major	1
88-90	Titan, lesser	1
91-00	Void Cruiser	1 (2-7 githyanki on board)

Special rules: The party will have no more than 6 encounters or 20 encounter checks (whichever comes first) before running across the Githyanki Outpost. If the outpost has not been encountered by the time the sixth encounter is determined, or the 20th encounter check is made, the party will automatically locate it at the end of the next four-hour interval. The party will always have at least two encounters (or reach the maximum of 20 encounter checks) before finding the outpost; if the Githyanki Outpost is indicated by a roll on the table for the first or second actual encounter, roll again until a different result is obtained.

THE VOID CRUISER

This small ship, designed by the githyanki to speed group travel through the Astral Plane, has the hull/fuselage shape of a large sailing ship but does not have masts. Along either side of the hull are batwing-shaped sails — for decoration and stabilization only; they have no effect on the ship's speed.

A Void Cruiser can carry up to 12 man-sized passengers. It travels at a movement rate equal to that of the most intelligent passenger, and in the direction desired by that "pilot." If two or more individuals in the traveling group have the same high intelligence, the "pilot" for the voyage being undertaken is determined at random, and will serve in that role until one or more of the eligible individuals disembarks, at which time another random selection is made for the subsequent voyage. (For purposes of this adventure, ignore the 96" astral movement rate given for the githyanki in the FIEND FOLIO™ Tome. All characters and creatures, moving as individuals, can travel in the Astral Plane at a rate of 10" per point of intelligence, as specified in the article accompanying this adventure. Githyanki intelligence ranges from 15-18 and can be determined randomly by a roll of d4 + 14, or a score can be assigned to each githyanki by the DM.)

Those traveling in a Void Cruiser will never be lost, thrown off course, or otherwise harmed by the Psychic Wind. The ship can carry a cargo of up to 100 cubic feet in volume in a small hold accessed through a hatch in the floor of the passenger compartment. A Void Cruiser cannot travel anywhere except on the Astral Plane, but can be employed by creatures and characters of any type.

THE GITHYANKI OUTPOST

When adventurers encounter the outpost, they will have no way of automatically knowing that Fedifensor lies inside. If they pass up the opportunity to approach the outpost and avoid or evade any pursuit from residents of the outpost that might have sighted them, the quest for the sword is effectively over at that point. They may have many more encounters, but will eventually choose to (or be forced to) abandon the search and re-enter the Prime Material Plane — unless the DM chooses to allow for the possibility of encountering the outpost a second time. The player characters' sense of adventure, not to mention their common sense, should dictate that they give the outpost more than a cursory examination.

The outpost is built in, and projecting out from, a roughly spherical piece of astral debris 200 feet in diameter. Four towers jut out from the central section at roughly symmetrical angles. A fifth projection, longer and thicker than the towers, is topped by a bulbous end with four smaller towers jutting out near the edges of a large set of double doors — the only apparent route by which to enter the complex. Without the

largest of the projections, the outpost would closely resemble a jack, of the sort used in the "ball and jacks" game played by children on the Prime Material Plane.

GITHYANKI ENCOUNTER TABLE

Once adventurers enter the githyanki outpost, encounter checks must be made every turn. The base chance for an encounter is a roll of 1 on d6. After the first random encounter, the rest of the complex will be on alert, and the chance for additional encounters rises to a roll of 1 or 2 on d6. If an encounter is indicated, roll on this table to determine the type:

d& roll	Encounter type
01-50	2-12 githyanki warriors of levels 1-3
51-53	Commander Okemocik (8th/8th Ftr/M-U)
54-58	Captain Mimhanok (8th Ftr)
59-61	Captain Perragourp (6th/6th Ftr/M-U)
62-74	2-8 githyanki knights, all 8th level fighters
75	Warlock Symafya (7th M-U)
76-77	Warlock Morikemoe (5th M-U)
78-79	Sergeant Yebabidek (6th Ftr)
80-81	Sergeant Salizechnag (5th Ftr)
82	Sergeant Liknullerkl (7th Ftr)
83-84	'Gish' Kadzar (4th/4th Ftr/M-U)
85-86	'Gish' Tomorcus (4th/4th Ftr/M-U)
87-88	'Gish' Zigrack (4th/4th Ftr/M-U)
89-90	'Gish' Quazmo (4th/4th Ftr/M-U)
91-00	Roll twice, ignoring results of 91-00

There will never be any more or any fewer githyanki at the outpost than the roster of "name" characters given above, plus 8 knights (all 8th level fighters with 60 hit points each) and a total of 60 warriors, evenly divided between 1st level (7 hit points each), 2nd level (15 hp each), and 3rd level (26 hp each) fighters. The knights are all chaotic evil, the warriors neutral evil. The knights carry +3 silver swords, while the warriors and all the "gish" use non-magical long swords. (Hit points for each creature can be determined randomly if the DM so desires.) All githyanki at the outpost are wearing their "war expedition" armor (AC 0) unless otherwise noted.

Commander Okemocik is lawful evil and has 64 hit points. He is carrying the following spells: burning hands, magic missile, read magic, shocking grasp, detect good, knock, wizard lock, dispel magic, fireball, hold person, extension I, polymorph self. He wields a +5 silver sword (no vorpal abilities).

Captain Mimhanok is lawful evil and has 59 hit points. He wields a +3 long sword.

Captain Perragourp is lawful evil and has 48 hit points. Spells: burning hands, charm person, read magic, shocking grasp, pyrotechnics, ray of enfeeblement, fireball (x2). Weapon: +2 long sword.

Symafya the Warlock is neutral evil and has 21 hit points. Spells: detect magic, hold portal, read magic, shocking grasp, detect good, knock, wizard lock, fireball, dispel magic, extension I. She is unarmored (AC 9) and does not carry a weapon, although she can use a long sword.

Morikemoe the Warlock is lawful evil and has 14 hit points. Spells: burning hands, magic missile (x2), read magic, detect good, darkness 15' radius, mirror image, hold person. He is AC 9 and unarmed, but can use a sword if he obtains one.

Sergeant Yebabidek is neutral evil and has 48 hit points and a +1 two-handed sword. **Sergeant Salizechnag** is neutral evil, has 34 hit points, and carries a +1 two-handed sword. **Sergeant Liknullerkl** is lawful evil, has 54 hit points, and carries a +3 long sword.

Kadzar is lawful evil and has 30 hp. Spells: burning hands, read magic, shocking grasp, detect good, mirror image. **Tomorcus** is neutral evil, 28 hp. Spells: magic missile, read magic, shocking grasp, forget, knock. **Zigrack** is lawful evil, 29 hp. Spells: hold portal, magic missile, read magic, darkness 15' radius, pyrotechnics. **Quazmo** is lawful evil, 31 hp. Spells: burning hands, read magic, shocking grasp, knock, wizard lock.

AREA DESCRIPTIONS

All walls and floors in the outpost are made of opaque stone. Windows, and the tops of each of the towers, are made from bricks of a clear crystalline substance that has the strength of rock; it will crumble and break, but will not shatter like glass.

Note: Directions like "up" and "down," locations like "floor" and "ceiling," have no universal meaning in this weightless environment. However, terms like these are used in the area descriptions for simplicity and clarity; when interpreting such terms, consider the surface depicted on the map as the "floor," as though you are looking "down" on the outpost from overhead.

1) Void Cruiser Port: This chamber is roughly spherical, about 100 feet in diameter. It has a large set of double doors, closed but unlocked, on the outside wall. A smaller set of double doors, wizard locked and barred on the inside, are on the opposite wall. One void cruiser is docked inside the chamber, and there is room for three more. Four 10-foot-wide passages (A, B, C, D) lead away from the sphere, each of them a 30-foot-long corridor capped by a small, transparent tower that can hold one githyanki guard. Inside tower "A" is a level 3 fighter.

2) Corridor: Inside the wizard-locked door is a hallway 20 feet wide and 40 feet high. Double doors lead into areas 4 and 5.

3) Entry Hall: This is an open area with an alcove on the far side. Two rows of pillars dominate the side areas, reaching the full 40-foot span from floor to ceiling and providing strength for the "wing" that protrudes from the core of the complex. The double doors in the alcove are locked from the inside, and stationed in the corners of the alcove are a pair of guards (level 2 and level 3). The adventurers will sight the guards at a range of 60-90 feet, while the inattentive guards will not spot the intruders until they are within 40-70 feet. The guards will instantly be aware of a foreign presence if the adventurers try to pass through the doors leading to area 4 or 5. If the guards sight the intruders first, they will pound on the alcove doors to alert another pair of guards (also level 2 and level 3) stationed inside the alcove doors. These guards will either go to warn their comrades, putting the outpost on alert, or unlock the doors and join the fight (50% chance of each).

4) Captain's Quarters: This is the residence of Captain Perragourp. Like the other living quarters in the outpost, it contains some basic furnishings and a few personal items. Furniture and other large items are attached to the flat surfaces of the chamber; odds and ends are simply left to float in the weightlessness of astral space. If Captain Perragourp has not yet been encountered, he will be discovered here on a roll of 1-2 on d6.

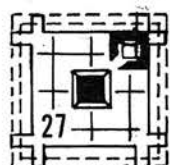
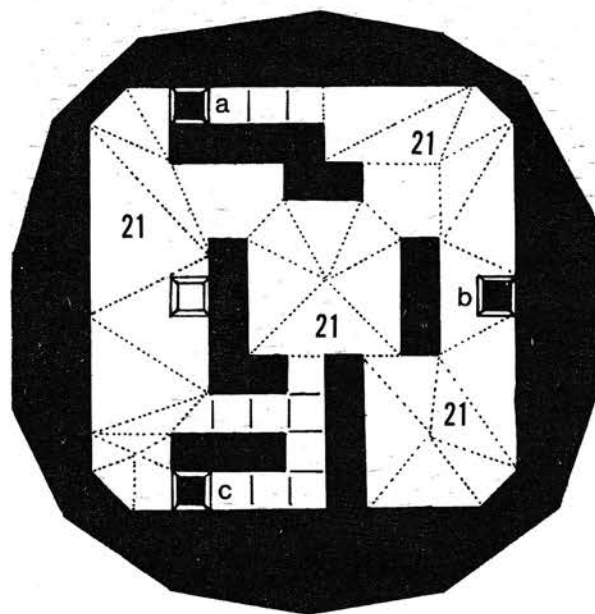
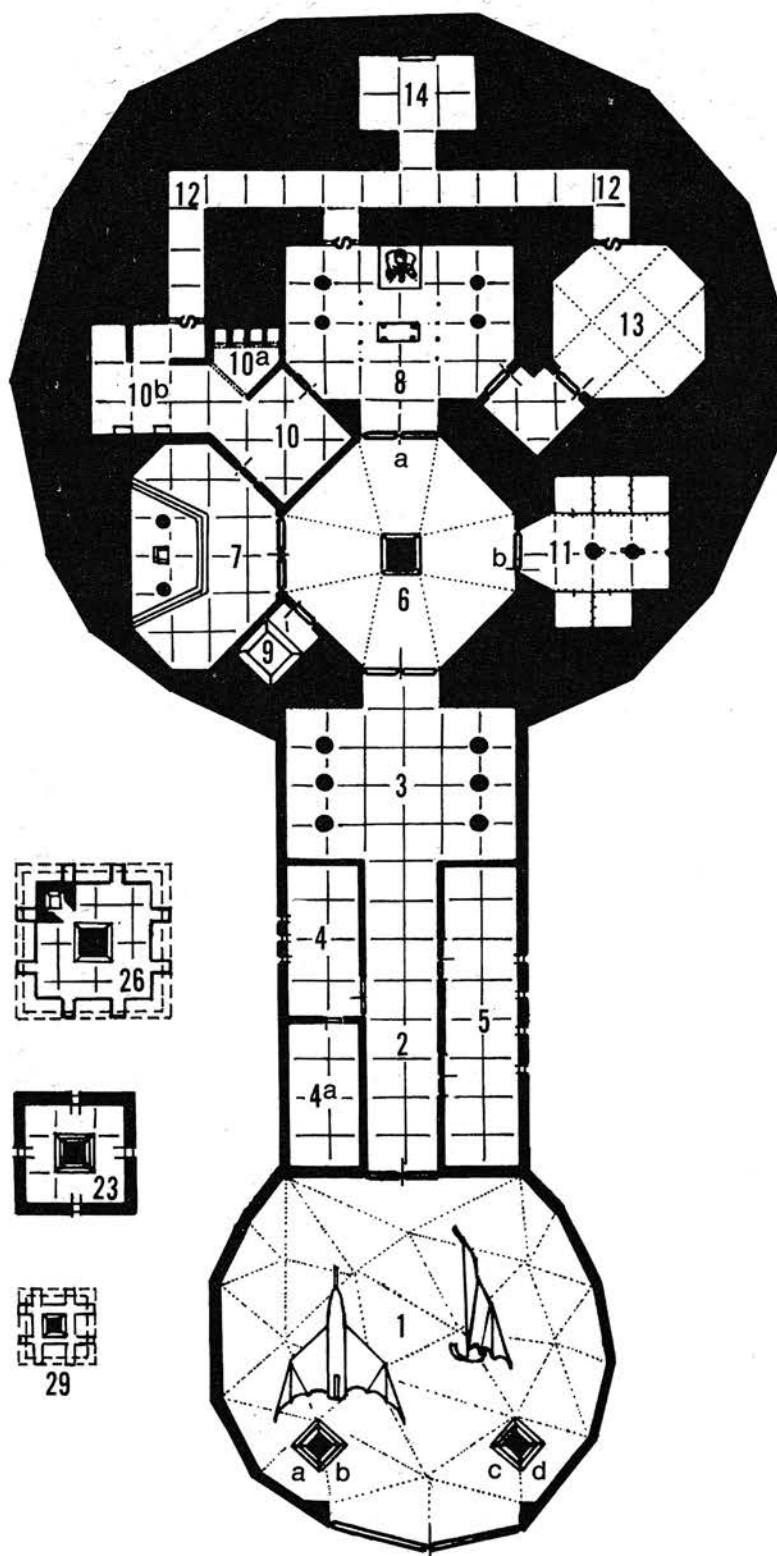
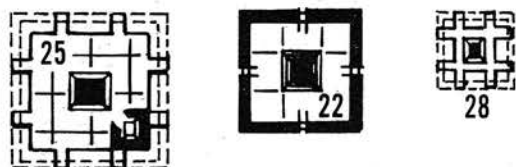
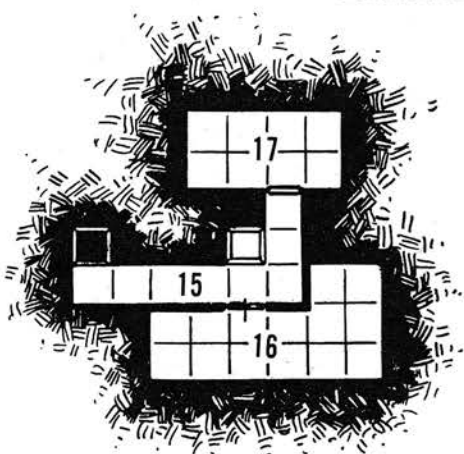
4A) Captain's Quarters: This is Captain Mimhanok's room, essentially identical to the other captain's chamber. Among the "odds and ends" floating in this room is a +3 long sword in its scabbard. As above, there is a 2 in 6 chance that Captain Mimhanok will be here if he has not already been encountered.

5) Knights' Quarters: This room is bare of furnishings except for a large table and eight chairs bolted to the floor, eight "living compartments" on the ceiling, and eight chests along the walls holding personal items. There will be 0-5 (d6-1) knights in the room when it is entered.




6) Main Hall: This roughly spherical chamber is unfurnished. Doors lead away from it in five directions. A 10-foot-square passage leads down from the center of the room into area 21. The door to area 8 is wizard locked, the one to area 11 is locked normally, and those to areas 7 and 9 are closed but unlocked.

7) Throne Room: An open area here surrounds a raised platform which houses an ornate throne, studded with jewels, set between two huge pillars. The door to area 10 is locked.

8) Worship Room: The main feature of this chamber is a 15-foot-tall statue of the githyanki lich-queen, fastened to the midpoint of the wall opposite the double doors. An altar is on the floor in front of the statue, and pairs of pillars flank the area of the altar and the statue. Two rows of braziers spew forth clouds of thick smoke that obscure side-to-side vision within the room. The statue and the altar are lavishly decorated with jewels and precious metals. The empty chamber connecting area 8 with area 13 has closed but unlocked doors on both sides.



The Githyanki Outpost

-  Passage leads up
-  Passage leads down
-  Passage leads both ways

Scale:
1 inch =
50 feet

9) Upper Level Access: This small room contains a passage which leads up to area 15.

10) Commander's Quarters: Miscellaneous furnishings are fastened to all six flat surfaces in this chamber. Running from floor to ceiling is a 2-foot-diameter stone pillar with an 8-foot-diameter cylindrical table protruding from the center of the pillar. Six drawers are cut into the sides of the table. Five of them contain items of no special worth, and the sixth holds a set of four scroll/map cases. Inside one of the four cases is a scroll of dispel magic; the other three cases contain maps of portions of the Astral Plane and will be unusable by player characters.

Fastened to the far wall (partially separating area 10 from area 10B) is a 10-foot-diameter net of coarse mesh, the sort that looks suitable for trapping monsters or characters. This is actually a net of matter transmission: If it is cast over a victim so as to ensnare him or her (by a normal "to hit" roll), the target character or creature will "disappear," having been instantly teleported to one of the empty suspension cells (see area 10A). There is a 50% chance that Commander Okemocik will be in this chamber if he has not already been encountered. He will prefer to use the net ahead of any other attack form if such an option is available to him.

10A) Suspension Cells: The barrier between area 10 and this chamber looks like a thick piece of frosted glass, shaped in a hexagon 10 feet in diameter. It cannot be opened, cracked, or smashed by anything less than a +2 weapon, a knock spell, or a dispel magic spell. If a living being stands in front of the frosted portal for 1 round without striking or touching the "glass," the center section (1 foot in diameter) will begin to glow red. If any object is brought into contact with this red area right away, it will be seen that the object can be passed into or through what is now an opening. The rest of the portal will still be impervious to normal passage, however. If the red area is left untouched for another round after it first appears, it will expand to envelop the entire portal, allowing passage through the 10-foot-diameter hole into the small chamber beyond. The full-sized opening will close within 1 round after it has been activated.

The chamber contains four more "frosted" portals, each a 5-foot-diameter hexagon, which are identical in nature to the larger portal and can be opened in the same way. These are seals for 5-foot-square cells in which prisoners (taken by the commander's net or otherwise captured) can be placed. The cells on the extreme left and right (as viewed from just inside the large portal) contain a mind flayer and a night hag, respectively. If either or both of these cells is partially or fully opened, the resident creature will do everything in its power to escape and overcome those who released it.

10B) Commander's Annex: The second room of Commander Okemocik's suite contains several wall decorations and two "false front" sets of empty shelving. They are locked and hinged. If unlocked, they can be swung outward to reveal a locked treasure chest behind each. The second chest discovered will be the one that contains Fedifensor, still in its sheath. The first chest which is opened by adventurers (or a creature they are forcing to do their bidding) will contain pieces of armor that, when assembled, will form a suit of +4 splint mail. Each chest also contains 1,000-6,000 g.p. worth of gems and jewelry.

11) Dungeon: This chamber has 10 cages, made of thick metal bars, arranged in two tiers along the walls on either side of the door. The center of the chamber has two stone pillars that run from floor to ceiling (30 feet). Four pairs of chains with manacles attached to the ends are fastened into each pillar at wide intervals. The room contains no prisoners (unless one or more members of the adventuring party have been captured).

12) Secret Passage: The existence of this corridor is known only to the commander and the two captains. It connects via secret doors with areas 8, 10B, and 13.

13) Coin Chamber: Githyanki appreciate all sorts of treasure, but they do not value "coin of the realm" as highly as gems and jewelry because they see little use for it. Currency of all shapes, sizes, and denominations (appropriated from previous "guests") is stored here, left floating inside the 40-foot sphere.

14) Communications Room: Only the commander and the two captains know of this room and know how to operate the mechanisms within it. The main feature of the room is a 10-foot-diameter hexagonal mirror on one wall. The device is a sort of view-screen/telephone that enables the outpost to communicate with the githyanki castle that supervises this complex. If a living being stands within 5 feet of the mirror and remains stationary for 1 round, the image of a githyanki captain on the other end will come into view. After one more round, the image seen by the captain on his view-screen will become clear. If what the captain sees is not another githyanki, he will move away from the screen immediately to sound an alert. This will bring 11-20 githyanki warriors and 2-4 sergeants, in a pair of void cruisers, to the outpost in 10 turns, to join the force already present. If adventurers strike the mirror with any weapon larger than a dagger, it will explode for 6d6 damage to anyone in the chamber.

15) Corridor: This area is reached by going up through the passage in area 9. It leads to another "up" passageway that opens into area 18.

16) Warlocks' Quarters: Each of the 2-foot-diameter pillars in this room has an 8-foot-diameter cylindrical table with 6 drawers set into the sides. Most of the drawers contain ordinary and valueless items. Two of the drawers in the table closest to the door contain metal scroll cases, one holding a cacodemon spell scroll and the other a death spell scroll. One of the drawers in the table farthest from the door contains an iron flask with an ice devil inside. The devil will attack anyone who opens the flask and releases the creature. Attached to one wall, along with several other less conspicuous garments, is a colorful cape that is actually a cloak of poisonousness. Any warlock(s) not encountered before this room is entered will be found here.

17) Guest Quarters: This room contains several pieces of furniture and other accessories, but nothing valuable or noteworthy. It is used by githyanki who come from the castle or another outpost to visit; there are no such visitors at present.

18) Upper Tower Chamber: This area is reached by traveling 50 feet up through the passage located at the bend in corridor 15. The chamber is 30x30 with a 20-foot ceiling. It is the living quarters of the gish Kadzar, who will probably be here (1-4 on d6) if he has not been encountered. The room has a small window (2 feet by 5 feet) in each wall and a 10-foot-square passage in the ceiling that leads up to area 19.

19) Upper Observation Post: This room is in the shape of a pyramid with a 30-foot-square base. The tapered ceiling is made entirely of transparent rock, through which a clear view of the surrounding astral space can be seen. Two warriors (level 1 and level 2) are on guard duty here. In the corner of the room is a 10-foot-square passage, 30 feet long, that leads up to area 20.

20) Pinnacle Post: From this location, at the farthest distance from the main part of the outpost, the best view of the area immediately around the outpost can be had. The 30-foot tower leading to this post is capped by a small pyramid of transparent stone. The pinnacle post is normally unoccupied and will not be manned unless an obvious threat to the security of the outpost is detected outside the structure.

21) Commons: Within the maze-like interior of this chamber are living quarters for the githyanki warriors and the sergeants. There are 4-16 warriors and 1-2 sergeants in this chamber, chosen from those warriors and sergeants not already encountered. Three passages lead downward from this area to the other tower chambers: passage A to area 22, passage B to area 23, and passage C to area 24.

22, 23, 24) Lower Tower Chambers: These are the living quarters of the other gish (Zigrack, Tomorcus, and Quazmo, respectively). They will likely (1-4 on d6) be in their quarters unless previously encountered. In all other respects, these areas are identical to area 18.

25, 26, 27) Lower Observation Posts: These areas are identical to area 19; each contains a pair of warriors (one level 1 and one level 2).

28, 29, 30) Pinnacle Posts: These areas are identical to area 20.

FEDIFENSOR

Weapon (greatsword), legendary (requires attunement by a creature of lawful good alignment)

The forging of the blade known as *Fedifensor* was the dream (quite literally) of a legendary high priest named Astramal. In divine visions, the priest saw his order destroyed by demonic forces—but he also saw the salvation of that order, in the form of a paladin in silver and white who wielded a remarkable magic greatsword. With his dream impressing upon him the form and powers of this blade, Astramal had it commissioned by master elf smiths. Those artisans would spend three years shaping steel and spellcraft to forge the sword, which they named “Defender of the Faith”—*Fedifensor* in their own tongue.

When wielded by any character of lawful good alignment, *Fedifensor* has a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. But when wielded by a lawful good paladin, the sword has a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls and the following additional properties.

Warded by Magic. While you hold the weapon, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Additionally, you can use an action to cast the *dispel magic* spell on yourself or the sword, automatically ending any spell of 3rd level or lower on that target. For each spell of 4th level or higher, make an ability check using your Charisma modifier or *Fedifensor*’s modifier (+4), whichever is higher. The DC equals 10 + the spell’s level.

Slayer of Evil. While you hold the sword, you can use your Divine Sense feature without expending any of its normal uses. If *Fedifensor* is unsheathed while any fiend or undead is within 60 feet of you, the sword glows bright red, as if just drawn from a forge furnace.

Whenever you hit a demon with a melee weapon attack using *Fedifensor*, the attack deals an extra 1d8 radiant damage. Further, if you use your Divine Smite against a demon, the extra damage dealt by that feature increases by 1d8 (in addition to the extra damage above).

Sentience. *Fedifensor* is a sentient lawful good weapon with an Intelligence of 17, a Wisdom of 15, and a Charisma of 19. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet.

The weapon communicates by transmitting emotions, sending a tingling sensation through the wielder’s hand when it wants to communicate something it has sensed. It can communicate more explicitly, through visions or dreams, when the wielder is either in a trance or asleep.

Personality. The sword cannot be touched or carried by anyone not of lawful good alignment, unless it is sheathed in the special scabbard constructed for it. A creature of another alignment that willingly comes into contact with *Fedifensor* for the first time on a turn takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage and gains 1 level of exhaustion.

Hounds of Space and Darkness

Three unusual dogs for the AD&D® game

by Stephen Inniss

The *Monster Manuals* and FIEND FOLIO® Tome offer a number of doglike creatures, but the range of possibilities is by no means exhausted. Each of the dogs described below fills a heretofore unoccupied niche in the AD&D® game world, and can provide a dimension of interest in the game beyond that of yet another monster to be hacked into small bits.

Gith dogs

In the years immediately following their emancipation from the illithids, or mindflayers, the followers of Gith (the githyanki and githzerai) acquired dogs from the Prime Material Plane and began to apply to them the same breeding techniques that they had so painfully learned from their former masters. The object of this project was to produce a breed of dog that would serve in a war of extermination on the illithid race. Great importance was attached to the production of these dogs, so much so that when the githyanki/githzerai split came, some called it the War of Dogs. The two factions had already diverged to the extent that they had separate breeding programs, and each side adopted the line it had bred as a symbol. After the series of conflicts that sundered the two races forever, the githyanki and githzerai clans continued their breeding programs, each claiming to follow the precepts laid down by Gith, and each reviling the other's perversion of doctrine.

Despite their long years of divergence, the two kinds of dogs have a number of features on common. Both have the senses of their canine ancestors, so that a gith dog gains a 20% bonus to its chances of detecting otherwise hidden creatures by scent, and a 20% bonus for its keen hearing (see page 60 of the *DMG*). These bonuses are cumulative where they are applicable, and either may be halved or doubled as conditions warrant. Gith dogs can also track as an *onyx dog* can (*DMG*, page 144). They gain a 50% bonus to their chances of detecting or tracking illithids by smell. In addition to this, gith dogs can see invisible, astral, and ethereal creatures

and objects. Alert and silent, they surprise opponents on a 1-4 and are themselves surprised only on a 1.

Each gith dog has a latent degree of psionic power which can be tapped under certain conditions. The githyanki and githzerai magic-users have a spell similar to *find familiar* which they may cast either for themselves or for other individuals. A dog that is bound to a psionically endowed master by this spell may serve as a storehouse of psionic energy, holding up to 20 psionic strength points in the manner of an *ioun stone* (*DMG*, page 147). These are added to the master's strength total and may be released to him or her so long as the dog remains within 12".

The bond has several other effects as well within the 12" range. It allows telepathic communication between hound and master, including the transfer of sensory information. The canine member of the team is immune to mental attacks, including *charm*, *confusion*, *sleep*, and *hold* spells, as well as the effects of a *psionic blast*. If the master succumbs to psionic attack, though, the dog is also affected. The two travel at the master's rate on the Astral Plane, and the dog is included if its master so desires when the psionic disciplines of astral projection or *psionic travel* are exercised, or when the master projects onto the Prime Material Plane.

Beyond this 12" range, either member of the team is aware of the direction (but not the distance) of the other, regardless of the separation between the two, as long as they are on the same plane. However, the stored ability points are not available to the master in this case. If the dog is killed, its master loses 40 psionic ability points immediately; if the score is reduced to a negative number, the master becomes comatose until a positive total is reached (strength points are regained in the normal ways).

When they encounter illithids or other psionically endowed foes, githyanki and githzerai send their dogs into physical combat while they batter down the psionic defenses of the foe. Gith dogs are particularly effective against illithids because their heads are not so positioned that an

illithid can comfortably attack with its tentacles (-4 on to-hit scores). The mindflayers hate and fear these beasts, and always retreat from them unless the illithids have servants of their own who can occupy the dogs.

Both kaoulgrim and szarkel (see below) are taught to grasp their enemies and hold on if so commanded. A hold is inflicted on a successful attack roll of 4 or more over the number needed to hit, and the victim is thereafter considered to be held by one leg, with combat penalties as given on page 67 of the *DMG*. The dog inflicts half its normal biting damage on each round thereafter, with no "to hit" roll required for the attack.

Gith dogs are relatively rare even among the githyanki and githzerai, each of which is only 1% likely per level of experience to have acquired one.

Kaoulgrim

The ultimate development of the githyanki breeding pens was the kaoulgrim, a massive, bearish dog with a shaggy coat, powerful jaws, and a compact build. Precisely what went into the making of the breed is unknown, but it is strongly suspected that the blood of creatures from the Lower Planes flows in its veins. It stands about 3' tall at the shoulder and weighs 200-300 pounds. Kaoulgrim are usually black, though golden-colored specimens are not unknown. The heavy fur forms a lionlike mane about the shoulders, and it is often clipped in some decorative pattern. The tongue and lips are black, and the small black eyes reflect a reddish light. The powerful voice is audible over distances of more than a mile. Kaoulgrim have a strong, musky, salty odor. These dogs may be outfitted with ornamental spiked collars if they have served well, or with plate armor in the ornate githyanki style. This armor confers AC 2 but limits the movement rate to 12".

Kaoulgrim are raised in githyanki colonies on the Prime Material Plane, since the nature of the Astral Plane does not allow conception or growth. Weak or otherwise unsatisfactory members of the litter are killed as soon as their deficiencies become

apparent, and the remainder are pitted against various creatures in savage public contests at the end of their first year. The survivors are matched to githyanki warriors, and, after the bonding ceremony, receive rigorous training over the course of the next two years, by which time they are mature. They then project with their masters onto the Astral Plane, where they serve indefinitely as guard and war dogs, aging only when they project with their masters onto some other plane. Unbonded dogs may serve as guards and breeding stock in the githyanki colonies.

Adult kaoulgrim are without exception vicious and mistrustful of strangers, though among themselves they are gregarious. They are tormented as pups by non-githyanki slaves as part of a program to instill this behavior. Githyanki warriors have boasted that their kaoulgrim are fed on the flesh of illithids as well as on that of various humans and demi-human races, and there is reason to believe that the latter claim at least is true. What one of these dogs would be like if it were brought up away from githyanki influence is unknown, since no thief has succeeded in stealing a pup and lived to carry out the experiment.

Szarkel

The antecedents of the szarkel breed are not known, though the blood of various doglike creatures from the chaotic planes was undoubtedly added to the line. Szarkel are certainly well adapted to the unpredictable planes of Limbo. A szarkel stands 3' high at the shoulder and may weigh 150 pounds or more. It is of slender build, with a long muzzle, a

long body and tail, and long legs. The teeth are unnaturally sharp. A szarkel's eyes are large and yellow, the pupil a vertical slit. The normal coat is short and gray, but these dogs have a limited *polymorph* ability that allows them to alter the color, length, and quality of the fur to suit local conditions: long and thick in cold weather, short in hot weather, waterproof in swampy territory, and so on, while its color may be any shade or combination of white, brown, red, black, or gray. Coat alteration takes one turn. The smell of szarkel is pleasant, rather like scented wood. Unlike normal dogs, szarkel can close their nostrils and swim comfortably under water, remaining active beneath the surface for up to three rounds at a time.

Szarkel are raised on the plane of Limbo, and are only found as adults on other planes where they join their masters in battle or in the hunt. During their first year, pups are given the run of the settlement, and the githzerai take no active part in their rearing. At the end of that time, juvenile szarkel choose and are chosen by candidate githzerai in a simple ceremony. Unbonded dogs are ejected from the community, and presumably do not survive the hazards of the Planes of Limbo by themselves. Once bonded, a szarkel is a loyal if sometimes willful follower, and obeys no one but its own master. Szarkel sometimes show an astounding degree of independent thought and initiative, but even the githzerai find them difficult to train. Though they are occasionally set to guard an area or item, szarkel are not reliable in this capacity. They are restless creatures and seldom remain in one spot for long. They constantly roam their mas-

ters' dwellings or encampments, awaiting a call to action or the approach of intruders. With their unpredictable and incessant movements and their keen senses, they make it extremely difficult for strangers to approach any large group of githzerai unnoticed.

Szarkel are sometimes equipped with light leathery armor made of a clear substance that the githzerai find or harvest on the planes of Limbo. This improves the dog's armor class by one place, but restricts its movement rate to 21". A szarkel is usually equipped with a simple collar identifying its master.

Szarkel are aloof and reserved, and do not seem to care much for each other's company. No more than three dogs can be housed in the same kennel; even then, there is sometimes fighting. The pups are cared for by both parents. Would-be thieves have found that the adults are vigilant, and that the githzerai are greatly disturbed if a litter is taken despite their otherwise indifferent attitude toward the pups.

XOTZCOYOTL (*Canis spelunca*)

FREQUENCY: *Common*
NO. APPEARING: 2-16
ARMOR CLASS: 7
MOVE: 18"
HIT DICE: 1
% IN LAIR: 5%
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-3
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Nil*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Semi- (at best)*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral*
SIZE: *S (2' tall at shoulder)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defense Modes: *Nil*
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *1/14 + 1 per hp*

Xotzcoyotli, also known as cavedogs or bat-faced dogs, are natives of the Deep Passages, coexisting with the drow, the illithids, and the svirfneblin. Though they are related to surface dogs, they have been molded by countless generations of exposure to the deep parts of the earth. In the constant temperatures of these regions, they have lost their fur but gained tough, velvet-smooth black hides instead. They have large, upright, pointed ears, and leaflike projections, on their snouts like those of bats, for they find their way by sound — echolocation. A xotzcoyotl's only hair is its long and sensitive set of whiskers, which it uses for close explorations. A xotzcoyotl has small dark eyes and a slender, graceful build. Its lips curve up at the end of the mouth, giving it a look of sly amusement.

The xotzcoyotl has an exquisite sense of smell, comparable to that of a prize bloodhound. It can track as an *onyx dog* (DMG, page 144) but with a 30% bonus, and is

GITH DOG (*Canis astri*, *Canis chaosi*)

	Kaoulgrim	Szarkel
FREQUENCY	<i>Very rare</i>	<i>Very rare</i>
NO. APPEARING:	<i>Varies with masters</i>	
ARMOR CLASS:	4	4
MOVE:	15"/9"	24"/12"
HIT DICE:	5 + 5	4 + 1
% IN LAIR:	<i>Varies with masters</i>	
TREASURE TYPE:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-12	2-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	<i>Hold</i>	<i>Hold</i>
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	<i>See text</i>	<i>See text</i>
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	<i>Standard</i>	10%
INTELLIGENCE:	<i>Semi-</i>	<i>Semi-</i>
ALIGNMENT:	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
SIZE:	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
PSIONIC ABILITY:	<i>See text</i>	<i>See text</i>
Attack/Defense Modes:	<i>See text</i>	<i>See text</i>
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE:	<i>IV/225 + 6 per hp</i>	<i>IV/205 + 5 per hp</i>



30% likely to detect otherwise hidden things by scent, as applicable. The depths of the earth are not entirely lightless, since they contain luminescent creatures and fungi as well as spellcasting sentient beings, so xotzcoyotl have highly sensitive if somewhat nearsighted eyes. They can make out details in what would be pitch darkness to a human, Xotzcoyotl eyes are so sensitive that they are useless in any illumination brighter than that of a torch, however.

As useful as its other senses are, the cavedog's primary sense is hearing. Not only can it pick up faint and distant sounds, but it also emits noises in the higher frequencies and interprets the echoes. This allows it to detect anything within a 60' radius, even fine thread, and to make rough determinations as to the extent of a cavern and the general nature of its contents within a much larger radius. Though sound has its limitations, it has unexpected advantages as well. For instance, a xotzcoyotl can tell the difference between a full container and an

empty one by the way the container resonates. This sense also allows the dog to locate invisible creatures and objects automatically (indeed, it may not know that they are supposed to be invisible), as well as creatures that are otherwise hidden from sight. A *silence* spell is not proof against this ability unless it is cast on the dog itself: a silent area is the auditory equivalent of impenetrable darkness and is quite conspicuous, especially when it moves. Cavedogs are immune to *phantasmal force* and its derivatives because of their reliance on echolocation.

Xotzcoyotl are as odorless as they are hairless, and can move quietly with 60% success even at a run. They surprise others on a 1-4 and are themselves surprised only on a 1.

Cavedogs forage cooperatively in small groups, and eat nearly anything: bats snatched from the air, insects, lizards, rats, fish scooped from the underground streams, carrion, the leavings of other subterranean creatures, and various edible fungi. They haunt underground cities, where they are sometimes tolerated as scavengers. Though they are cautious, they are not above finishing off the wounded or weakened, and occasionally risk attacks on man-sized prey. They are wary of traps and have intimate knowledge of each crevice, cranny, and bolt-hole in their home range, so that they are nearly impossible to catch.

Half the time when cavedogs are encountered in the lair, there is a litter of 2-8 pups present, the offspring of the dominant male and female in the pack. Other pack members help build and guard the carefully hidden nest and feed the young. If the lair is threatened, the adults silently pick up the pups and carry them away to a safer spot.

Xotzcoyotl communicate both sonically and supersonically. Their howls, barks, and clicks echo eerily down the corridors of the underworld, though it is surprisingly difficult to locate an individual by the noises it makes, or even to be sure how many dogs there are.

If captured as pups, xotzcoyotl can be raised as domestic dogs. They are charming as they are ugly, and are easy to train. However, they are not well adapted to surface life. They are as vulnerable to seasonal and daily temperature changes as unclothed humans are, and they sunburn easily despite their color. These disadvantages are not evident underground, though, and some of the subterranean races have bred new sizes and shapes from the original stock, just as humans have with domestic dogs of the surface world. The svirfnebli have a stocky breed with wrinkled gray skin, for instance, and the drow nobility have swift coursing dogs. The dark creepers and dark stalkers particularly favor this dog, and have developed several varieties. Ω

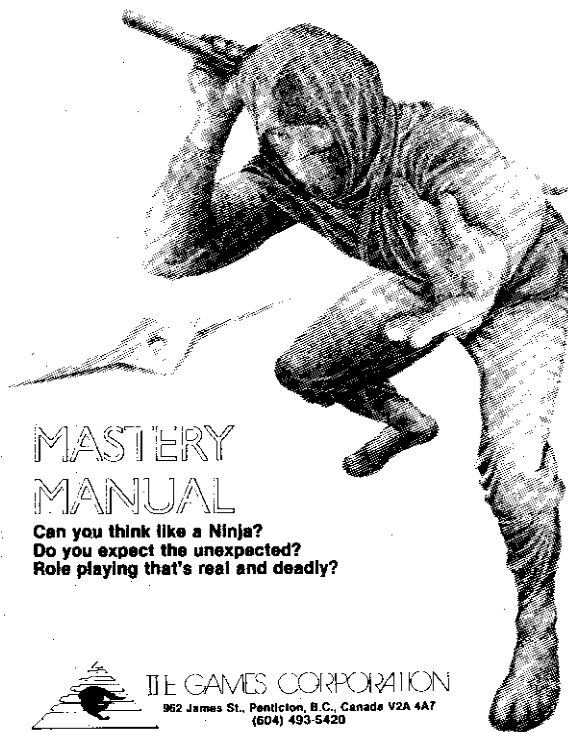
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NIGHT OF THE NINJA AND REALITY ROLE-PLAYING GAME ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OWNED BY THE GAMES CORPORATION

Adapting “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved”

By Rodney Thompson

I love continuity. While working on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, I learned to master it (as well as anyone can master the continuity of such a vast fictional universe). Even before then, I tried to make different aspects of the same universe work together. Back in the days of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd Edition, I reworked old Greyhawk modules to fit the continuity of my AL-QADIM campaign. Later, I adapted elements of my 2nd Edition FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting adventure for use in 3rd Edition. In the last year, I’ve run two epic-level 4th Edition games that are direct sequels to the Age of Worms adventures from the WORLD OF GREYHAWK campaign setting by having my group convert their characters from 3rd Edition D&D. I’ve even included references to the Ghost Tower of Inverness, another WORLD OF GREYHAWK location, in the most recent D&D ENCOUNTERS season.

Conquering the challenge of connecting two seemingly disparate elements is rewarding, both as a creative exercise and as a source of interesting ideas. The imagination involved in bridging concepts is what makes character creation in the D&D GAMMA WORLD Roleplaying Game so appealing: When you

give me “android” and “yeti” as character options, putting them together challenges me in an entertaining way.

Some months ago, I decided to bring my FORGOTTEN REALMS game to its climax, but I wasn’t sure how to wrap things up. I was leafing through old issues of *Dungeon* magazine when I came across issue 100, featuring “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved”—a famous adventure pitting the players against the githyanki lich queen Vlaakith. If you don’t already have the original adventure, you can download it as a companion piece to this article.

I had never had the chance to run the adventure in 3rd Edition, so converting it to 4th Edition to use as my campaign capstone excited me—especially after I discovered that none of my players had ever run, played, or even read the adventure. This conversion would help my players, who had been my gaming group only for 4th Edition, experience a classic part of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS tradition, while tying my campaign into the larger DUNGEONS & DRAGONS experience.

I knew that playing a Chris Perkins adventure, filled with great lore, would mark a high point in

our game. What I couldn’t predict was how this conversion would shape my view of adventures and adventure design in 4th Edition.

CONVERSION PHILOSOPHY

After my initial reread of “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved,” I made a few basic decisions. First, I would reproduce the original experience as faithfully as possible: Killer traps would remain as deadly as ever, and powerful spell effects would pack their same punch. Second, I would adapt mechanics with more precision and less “re-envisioning” than usual. Third, I would convert the monsters over using a direct correlation between challenge rating (CR) and level; thus, the CR 16 tl’a’ikiths (more on them later) would become level 16 soldiers. I did more redesign during monster conversion than I did anywhere else, because I wanted the levels to match the CRs so that the monsters would present about the same challenge as before. Finally, I would not alter the number of monsters in a given encounter. If three githyanki guarded a door in the original, three githyanki

would guard that door in my 4th Edition conversion. Effectively, I decided to ignore much of the advice from the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master’s Guide*® regarding building encounters and instead let the chips fall where they might, using the same assumptions Chris Perkins had used when designing the adventure for 3rd Edition.

With these three guiding principles in mind, I set out to begin the conversion.

PUTTING IN THE HOURS

The conversion process went more smoothly than I expected. For one thing, I already had a sizable stable of monsters converted. When I wrote the githyanki section of *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*™, I had relied on “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” for source material, so all I had to do now was to update the damage numbers to bring them in line with post-*Monster Manual*® 3 expectations. That approach took care of a lot of the rank-and-file githyanki the players would run into, allowing me to substitute them where appropriate for the githyanki troops that had class levels. In other cases, I took the equivalent creature from the appropriate book and adjusted its level. To convert the red dragon Holocaust, for example, I used the red dragon from *Monster Vault*™ and removed levels from it to match Holocaust’s challenge rating.

Later in the adventure, the characters end up face to face (to face) with Dessakrul, a two-headed red dragon. Again, I began with a stock red dragon. After adjusting the level, I added a few powers from the new hydra to give the dragon a more two-headed feel. This approach illustrates my first lesson of conversion:

Kr'y'izoth		Level 16 Artillery
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki		XP 1,400
HP 122; Bloodied 61	Initiative +10	
AC 30, Fortitude 26, Reflex 30, Will 28	Perception +13	
Speed 7	Low-light vision	
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 radiant		
TRAITS		
☼ Heat Mirage ♦ Aura 1		
Any enemy that attacks the kr'y'izoth from outside of the aura rolls its attack twice and keeps the lower result.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Blackflame Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d10 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of the kr'y'izoth's next turn.		
⚡ Lightning Bolt (lightning) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 4d10 + 3 lightning damage.		
☼ Scorching Ray (fire, force) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature, or two creatures adjacent to each other); +21 vs. Reflex		
Hit: 2d10 + 13 fire and force damage.		

Whenever possible, use the tools you already have—it’s a big time-saver.

Of course, I still had plenty of work to do on the more involved conversions. I made the 4th Edition versions of the kr’y’izoth (undead githyanki spellcasters whose life essences Vlaakith drained) and the tl’a’ikiths (their martial counterparts) my top priority. Because these two creatures show up multiple times throughout the adventure, I knew that their conversions would go a long way. After finishing them, I had taken care of most of my monsters. I’ve included two of them here as examples.

☼ Flesh to Stone (force) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 4d12 + 10 force damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

First Failed Save: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).

Second Failed Save: The target is instead petrified (save ends).

MOVE ACTIONS

Telekinetic Leap ♦ Encounter

Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the kr’y’izoth or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Blackflame Shield (fire, necrotic) ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An adjacent enemy touches the kr’y’izoth or hits it with a melee attack.

Effect (Opportunity Action): The triggering enemy takes 2d12 fire and necrotic damage.

Skills Arcana +20, Insight +18

Str 16 (+11)

Dex 14 (+10)

Wis 21 (+13)

Con 20 (+13)

Int 25 (+15)

Cha 8 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Deep Speech, Draconic

Tl’a’ikith	Level 16 Soldier
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki	XP 1,400
HP 157; Bloodied 78	Initiative +14
AC 32, Fortitude 29, Reflex 27, Will 28	Perception +13
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison; Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 10 radiant	
TRAITS	
☀ Attractive Whispers ♦ Aura 3	
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is pulled up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the tl’a’ikith.	
Insubstantial	
The tl’a’ikith takes half damage from attacks. Any time the tl’a’ikith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the end of its next turn.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⬇ Silver Sword (psychic, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 10 psychic damage.	
⬇ Violent Slash (psychic, weapon) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 18 psychic damage, and the target is removed from play (save ends). When the target saves, it appears in an unoccupied square of the tl’a’ikith’s choice adjacent to the tl’a’ikith.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Telekinetic Leap ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the tl’a’ikith or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Intercession of Will (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: Any enemy within 3 squares of the tl’a’ikith makes an attack that does not include the tl’a’ikith as a target.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The tl’a’ikith shifts up to 3 squares and makes a melee basic attack against the triggering enemy as a free action.	
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 18 (+12)
Con 21 (+13)	Int 12 (+9)
	Wis 20 (+13)
	Cha 10 (+8)
Alignment chaotic evil	
Languages Common, Deep Speech	
Equipment +4 githyanki silver longsword (Manual of the Planes™)	

The next step of the conversion process entailed adapting traps and magical effects from the 3rd Edition adventure to my 4th Edition game. Fortunately, Chris did me a big favor when he based his array of traps on the tir’su glyphs of the githyanki language and then reused the glyphs within his adventure. Rechristening them “a dialect of Deep Speech,” I converted each glyph as faithfully as possible. Because the originals glyphs mostly dealt damage, I could replicate them by having mine deal about the same damage as the encounter power of a monster of equivalent level. When I was finished, I had seven traps that I could use throughout the adventure.

With the monsters and traps handled, I could now tackle the tricky part: the other miscellaneous magical effects.

Much of the adventure takes place in the Palace of Whispers, home to *the whispers of the damned*, an effect disquieting enough to shake the nerve of even the bravest warrior. In 3rd Edition, a player failing the initial saving throw took a –2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks while in the palace. I decided to keep the same effect, with one exception: I changed the Will save to an attack against Will that triggered when the character first entered the structure.

My players soon discovered that they were no longer in the same “appropriate challenges with limited durations” game we’d been playing. Although this approach initially frustrated them, I decided not to budge because I wanted to see what they would do. To my (pleasant) surprise, my players reacted to the new dynamic by becoming more creative. During their first retreat from the Palace of Whispers, for example, they asked a wizard to deafen

them magically so that the palace’s disquieting susurrations could not affect them.

The strange doors that filled the lich queen’s palace also challenged the adventurers in various ways: One type required psionic powers to open, another dealt tons of damage to living creatures when they passed through, and still another kind, seemingly composed of undead flesh, refused to open for anyone other than Vlaakith. I converted these perilous portals faithfully, but I also added a few elements because I did not want my players to feel stymied; after all, the adventure proceeds through these doors. In my new version, items scattered throughout the palace enable characters to open certain doors or pass through them harmlessly; for example, one potion turns a character temporarily undead, whereas another provides a small amount of psionic power points. I placed these items in logical locations that would also require the characters to circumvent the doors a few times before finding them.

It worked. Although the players initially felt frustrated by the doors, they soon grew more and more resourceful. This adjustment gave rise to an interesting pacing dynamic: The early stages of exploring the Palace of Whispers consisted of a constant struggle against the palace itself, but, as the characters progressed—battling denizens and finding treasure caches along the way—they gained the means to move on to different challenges. The players became better at navigating the palace and, as its challenges faded into the background, the dangers posed by the monsters (and, eventually, Vlaakith herself) took center stage.

END RESULTS

In the end, a conversion succeeds or fails at the game table. This one went surprisingly well, even though its design sensibilities were so different from those of the campaign that preceded it. Up to this point I had designed my adventures by the book, worried that deviating from the *Dungeon Master’s Guide’s* advice would produce a game different from the one other people were playing, and therefore useless to anyone but me. It turns out that my fears were unfounded.

Running “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” using 4th Edition mechanics (while keeping the 3rd Edition flavor) added amusing new dynamics to the campaign’s climax. I enjoyed watching my players relearn lessons from earlier editions, such as the caution they began exercising after they started running into things they couldn’t overpower. I’m no big fan of the “your players should constantly fear for their characters’ lives” philosophy, but that doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy seeing my group exercise a bit more prudence (on the other hand, perhaps they had grown so cavalier because I had failed to instill a true sense of danger earlier in the campaign). I also enjoyed how the adventure’s complexity drove the players to return to old roleplaying standbys, such as mapping the dungeon themselves and keeping track of what they encountered and where.

With a few exceptions (such as the tricks for bypassing the doors), I resisted the temptation to provide ways around problems. This decision ran counter to my usual style of adventure design, in which a character overcame a noncombat test by making a skill check or passing a skill challenge. As soon as the players saw that they couldn’t just make a skill check to design a spell to counter *whispers of the damned*, they

realized that they needed to become more creative. The way they rose to the occasion made me realize that I had underestimated them when I designed my old adventures.

If making challenges harder on my players taught me something, so did making encounters easier. I discovered that it was OK for players to face only two opponents in one fight, even if neither of them was elite. The encounter went faster, and the players enjoyed occasionally rolling over the opposition. This taught me an important lesson: Attrition still means something in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Taking a little damage in a fight might be no big deal, but taking a little damage in five straight fights carries a toll because daily abilities run out and unspent healing surges dwindle.

When I looked at the pressure placed on the party’s resources over an entire adventure instead of a string of encounters, I found the results liberating. I realized that I did not need to balance every encounter to fall within an “acceptable range,” because, over a long enough period, the characters would end up drained of the same resources anyway. Even better, this approach made the hard fights feel harder. Retreating to preserve resources became viewed as a necessary and acceptable tactic, because the players knew that more challenges awaited, and they couldn’t count on having the resources needed to tackle them otherwise.

In the end, I learned a few things about both adventure design and 4th Edition that I’ll carry forward into future games. First, I found that my players face challenges more creatively—and feel more satisfied afterward—when I deprive them of an easy way out. Second, I learned that spikes of high tension and periods of low tension are good, and that having

a wider variance in encounter difficulty works out because of long-term attrition. Third, I realized that I could include “unfair” elements—such as instant-kill traps or ongoing effects that messed with characters—as long as I used them to punctuate the dangers of the adventure and not as constant beat-downs. Fourth, I learned that exploration is essential to the classic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS feel, and that traps and hazards are more than set dressing—they constitute an important part of the exploration and discovery process. The weird doors in the Palace of Whispers aren’t just obstacles; they are something to investigate—dire entryways that reinforce the alien feel of the adventure’s setting.

Finally, my greatest lesson was that my players were better equipped to handle challenges than I thought. Even when they failed, they found ways to continue the adventure as long as I gave them enough freedom to execute their own plans.

CONVERTING TO OTHER EDITIONS

Here is my quick take on converting “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 1st or 2nd Edition.

The 1st Edition *Fiend Folio* provides basic information on githyanki that we can use to populate our dungeon. That’s half the battle. We also need a way to convert the rich variety of githyanki variants that make “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” so memorable. Luckily, we can summarize 1st Edition monsters in just a few lines, so we can convert many of these terrific monsters quickly.

From the original adventure, we know that the lich queen rarely allows her servants to grow

powerful enough to threaten her. Instead, she drains their life essences as a part of her plan to achieve apotheosis. The *Fiend Folio* tells us that the supreme commanders of the githyanki top out at 11th level, and Tiamat, whom Vlaakith serves, has 16 Hit Dice, so it follows that Vlaakith herself is around 13th or 14th level. Here is Vlaakith’s entry in AD&D *Monster Manual* format.

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 1

ARMOR CLASS: 0

MOVE: 6”

HIT DICE: 13 (104 hit points)

TREASURE TYPE: 100% H, S, T, U

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2-12/3-18/3-18

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Magic use*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Magic weapons to hit; not affected by charm, cold, electricity or fire*

INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*

ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*

SIZE: M

PSIONIC ABILITY: 250

Attack/Defense Modes: All

CHANCE OF:

Speaking: 100%

Magic Use: 100%

Sleeping: 0%

Vlaakith’s multiple attacks come from her *paralyzing touch* (any creature hit by this attack must make a saving throw against paralysis, with failure indicating permanent paralysis) and her *dancing sword*. Vlaakith can cast two spells of each level, up to and including 6th, and she knows every magic-user spell.

Now let’s take a crack at converting the creatures that populate the lich queen’s palace.

Duthka’gith: Because these creatures are half-githyanki/half-red dragon hybrids, the easiest approach is to start with githyanki and then layer on a few red dragon traits (AC: 3; MV: 6”; HD: 10; HP: 45; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Breath weapon per red dragon*; SD: *Unaffected by heat*).

Tl’a’ikiths: For these undead githyanki warriors, begin with a basic githyanki and add a few traits similar to a lich. Because tl’a’ikiths are incorporeal, you can adapt the requirement of needing magic weapons to hit (AC: 4; MV: 6”; HD: 9; HP: 41; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Psionic ability 150* ; SD: *Unaffected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; +1 or better weapons to hit*).

Kr’y’izoths: Much like tl’a’ikiths, you build kr’y’izoths by starting with a githyanki and adding undead defenses. Since these creatures were spellcasters in life, give them magical ability, as well as *blackflame shield*. (AC: 5; MV: 6”; HD: 9; HP: 41; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Magic use, psionic ability 150*; SD: *Cannot be affected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; any creature that touches the kr’y’izoth or hits it with a melee attack takes 3d6 damage from blackflame shield*).

For the conversion to 2nd Edition, start with the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* stats above and convert the movement to a standard 2nd Edition movement rating. Otherwise, much of what’s in the stat block still applies. The *Monstrous Manual* lists statistics for the rank-and-file githyanki, so it is a good starting point for building the typical githyanki found in the adventure. You will need the optional psionics

rules from *The Complete Psionics Handbook* to finish Vlaakith and her minions.

Obviously, these are the bare bones. It’s up to you to flesh them out by picking spells and psionic abilities for your monsters. After that, equip a few githyanki with class levels to add variety to your player’s enemies. The system already includes equivalents of the traps and magic items that lie scattered throughout the adventure. Then again, you might find creating the glyph traps from scratch in your system of choice to be worthwhile—not to mention fun.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game include *Monster Manual*®, the DARK SUN® Campaign Setting, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.

VLAAKITH THE LICH-QUEEN

Commanding vast armies in citadels across the Astral Plane is Vlaakith, the thousand-year-old lich-queen to whom all githyanki owe fealty (or at least pretend to). She rarely ventures beyond her obsidian Palace of Whispers, but her eyes, ears, and mind-probing instruments are everywhere.

Vlaakith is also the reason why there are no githyanki clerics. A would-be goddess herself, Vlaakith cannot abide the notion of a githyanki worshipping anyone else. In githyanki society, offering a prayer to anyone other than Vlaakith is a capital crime.

Vlaakith is described below with the items she's never without, including the *crown of corruption* and the *scepter of Ephelomon*.

➤ **Vlaakith the Lich-Queen, Female Githyanki Lich** **Wiz25:** CR 28; Medium Undead; HD 25d12; hp 180; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 33, touch 20, flat-footed 27; BAB +13; Grap +16; Atk +21 melee (2d6+9/19–20, +5 dancing vorpal silver sword) or +16 melee touch (1d8+5 plus paralysis, negative energy touch); Full Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (2d6+9/19–20, +5 dancing vorpal silver sword) or +16 melee touch (1d8+5 plus paralysis, negative energy touch); SA damaging touch, fear aura, paralyzing touch, psion-

ics, spells; SQ damage reduction 15/magic bludgeoning, immunities (cold, electricity, polymorph, mind-affecting attacks), +4 turn resistance; SR 30; AL CE; Fort +8, Ref +14, Will +17; Str 16, Dex 22, Con —, Int 32, Wis 16, Cha 25.

Skills: Concentration +28, Craft (alchemy) +37, Diplomacy +9, Hide +14, Intimidate +21, Knowledge (arcana) +39, Knowledge (history) +23, Knowledge (the planes) +39, Listen +11, Move Silently +14, Search +34, Sense Motive +29, Spellcraft +41, Spot +26. **Feats:** Craft Epic Wondrous Item, Craft Wondrous Item, Empower Spell, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*silver sword*), Extend Spell, Forge Ring, Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Greater Spell Focus (Transmutation), Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Spell Capacity (10th), Improved Spell Capacity (11th), Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spell Focus (Transmutation), Spell Penetration.

Damaging Touch (Ex): Vlaakith's black, desiccated body courses with negative energy, such that her touch deals 1d8+5 points of damage. A successful Will save (DC 29) halves the damage.

Fear Aura (Su): Vlaakith's form is so horrid that creatures with fewer than 5 Hit Dice within 60 feet must succeed at a Will save (DC 29) or be affected as the *fear* spell cast by a 25th-level caster.

Immunities: Liches are immune to cold, electricity, polymorph, and mind-influencing spells and effects. As long as she is holding the *scepter of Ephelomon*, Vlaakith is also immune to fire.

Paralyzing Touch (Su): Any living creature touched by Vlaakith must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 29) or be permanently paralyzed. *Remove paralysis* and any curse-removing spell can free the victim, but the paralyzing touch cannot be dispelled. The victim appears dead; only a successful Spot check (DC 20) or Heal check (DC 15) reveals that the victim is still alive.

Psionics (Sp): 3/day—blur, daze (DC 17), *dimension door*, *mage hand*, *telekinesis* (DC 22); 1/day—*plane shift* (DC 24). Caster level 25th; save DC 17 + spell level.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/7/7/7/10/6/6/6/5/5/2/2; base save DC = 22 + spell level): 0—*detect magic* ×2, *mage hand*, *open/close*; 1st—*change self*, *magic missile* ×2, *obscuring mist*, *shield* ×2, *unseen servant*; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *detect thoughts* ×2, *mirror image*, *touch of idiocy* ×2, *web*; 3rd—*dispel magic*, *displacement*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle against good*, *empowered ray of enfeeblement*, *slow**, *extended spectral hand*; 4th—*animate dead*, *contagion**, *dimensional anchor* ×2, *enervation*, *extended haste* ×2, *extended heroism*, *screaming*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*dismissal* (DC special), *hold monster*, *empowered vampiric touch*, *magic jar**, *wall of force*, *waves of fatigue*; 6th—*disintegrate** ×2, *empowered enervation*, *greater dispel magic* ×2, *true seeing*; 7th—*extended eyebite** ×2, *finger of death**, *greater teleport* ×2, *waves of exhaustion*; 8th—*empowered circle of death**, *horrid wilting**, *protection from spells*, *screen* ×2; 9th—*foresight*, *gate*, *empowered spell turning*, *wail of the banshee**, *wish*; 10th—*extended dominate monster*, *empowered horrid wilting**; 11th—*empowered time stop* ×2.

*Necromancy or Transmutation spells. The base save DC for these spells is 24 + spell level.

Possessions: +5 dancing vorpal silver sword (treat as greatsword), crown of corruption, scepter of Ephelomon, headband of intellect +6, bracers of armor +8, gloves of Dexterity +6, cloak of Charisma +6, ring of wizardry IV, ring of protection +4, robe of eyes, scrolls (prismatic sphere, time stop, protection from spells, shapechange, stone shape), ring of 12 iron keys (keys unlock chests in area 36).

VLAAKITH'S TACTICS

Vlaakith begins the adventure in her throneroom (area 7) and senses whenever living creatures enter her palace. At that point, she begins using the *clairaudience/clairvoyance* ability granted by the magic of her palace to spy on the interlopers. If she detects the arrival of githyanki, she sends Xam'kras and his Ch'r'ai lieutenants (see area 10) to confront them and determine their intentions. If she detects the arrival of non-githyanki intruders or discovers that the newly arrived githyanki seek to destroy her, she sends any nearby tl'a'ikiths to annihilate them. If the tl'a'ikiths are destroyed, she sends Xam'kras, his subordinates, and any nearby duthka'giths to finish the job.

DEFENSIVE TACTICS

While her minions keep the PCs busy, Vlaakith prepares for battle. She casts empowered *time stop* so that she may cast the following array of spells on herself before leading six tl'a'ikiths and six kr'y'izoths into battle against the interlopers:

Round 1: *Foresight* (lasts 250 minutes; can't be surprised or flat-footed; +2 insight bonus to AC and Reflex saves) and quickened *displacement* (lasts 25 rounds; attacks suffer a 50% miss chance).

Round 2: *Stoneskin* (lasts 250 minutes or until discharged; gains damage reduction 10/adamantine; spell can absorb up to 150 points of damage) and quickened *protection from spells* (lasts 250 minutes; gains +8 resistance bonus on saves against spells and spell-like abilities).

Round 3: Empowered *spell turning* (lasts 250 minutes or until expended; 1d4+6 levels of targeted spells are turned back at the caster, +50% because the spell is empowered).

Round 4: Extended *haste* (lasts 50 rounds; gains extra attack during a full attack action; +1 bonus on attack rolls; +1 dodge bonus to AC; +1 dodge bonus on Reflex saves; speed increases by 30 feet).

Round 5: *True seeing* (lasts 25 minutes; sees through darkness and illusions, and recognizes true forms) and quickened *magic circle against good* (250 minutes; gains +2 resistance bonus on all saving throws; prevents bodily contact by summoned or conjured creatures except evil elementals and evil outsiders).

If half of her undead bodyguards are turned or destroyed, or if she is reduced to 90 or fewer hit points, Vlaakith casts *greater teleport* to reach her reliquary (area 38). There, the lich-queen instructs her kr'y'izoth minions to use their spell conversion ability to heal her, which they do at once. She then casts empowered *time stop* so that she may cast the following defensive spells on herself:

Round 1: Extended *heroism* (lasts 500 minutes; gains +2 morale bonus on attack rolls, saves, and skill checks).

Round 2: Extended *haste* (lasts 50 rounds; gains extra attack during a full attack action; +1 bonus on attack rolls; +1 dodge bonus to AC; +1 dodge bonus on Reflex saves; speed increases by 30 feet).

Round 3: *Dimensional anchor* (lasts 25 minutes; protects against maze spells) and quickened *blur* (25 minutes; attacks suffer a 20% miss chance).

Round 4: *Bull's strength* (lasts 25 minutes; +4 Strength) and quickened *mirror image* (lasts 25 minutes; creates 8 images).

Round 5: *Stoneskin* (lasts 250 minutes or until discharged; gains damage reduction 10/adamantine; spell can absorb up to 150 points of damage) from the scroll she carries.

If Vlaakith is destroyed, her life essence returns to her phylactery, which is hidden in area 49.

OFFENSIVE TACTICS

Vlaakith's offensive tactics vary, depending on whom she's fighting. When faced with multiple opponents, she prefers to send her *dancing vorpal sword* after the most threatening foe while casting the following spells:

Wail of the banshee: Affects up to 25 creatures within a 40-ft.-radius spread, starting with creatures closest to the spell's point of origin; undead are immune.

Horrid wilting: Deals 20d6 points of damage (20d8 against water elementals and plant creatures) to living creatures, no two of which can be more than 60 feet apart.

Slow: Up to 25 creatures, no two of which can be more than 30 feet apart, can take only a single move action or standard action each turn, but not both; creatures also move at half speed and take a –1 penalty on attack rolls, AC, and Reflex saves.

When targeting spellcasters or characters with poor Fortitude saves, Vlaakith prefers the following spells:

Greater dispel magic: Targets enemy spellcaster (roll 1d20+20 per ongoing spell in effect)

Extended *spectral hand* (lasts 50 minutes): Used to deliver touch range spells such as *contagion*, *touch of idiocy*, and empowered *vampiric touch*; +2 bonus on melee touch attack rolls; Vlaakith loses 1d4 hit points that return when the spell ends, but not if the hand is destroyed.

Finger of death: Creature dies or takes 3d6+25 points of damage on a successful save.

Disintegrate: Creature takes 40d6 points of damage, or 5d6 if the save succeeds.

When targeting armored characters or characters with poor Will saves, Vlaakith prefers the following spells:

Enervation: Target gains 1d4 negative levels; each negative level gives a –1 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, ability checks, and effective level.

Empowered *enervation:* Target gains 1d4 negative levels, +50% because the spell is empowered; each negative level gives a –1 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, ability checks, and effective level.

Dismissal: Forces extraplanar creature back to its own plane (80% chance) or another plane (20% chance).

Extended dominate monster: Target follows orders for 50 days.

Empowered ray of enfeeblement: Target takes 1d6+5 points of Strength damage, +50% because the spell is empowered.

CALLING FOR AID

Vlaakith's palace contains plenty of guardians. If these prove insufficient, the lich-queen uses the *gate* ability of the *scepter of Ephelomon* to bring forth a very old red dragon (see *Monster Manual*, page 75). She can also use her *gate* spell to call forth a paeliryon devil (see *Fiend Folio*, page 58) named Urrfestro that owes her a favor.

NEW ARTIFACTS

Vlaakith has two artifacts in her possession at all times: the *crown of corruption* and the *scepter of Ephelomon*. These unique items are described below.

CROWN OF CORRUPTION

This slender, black-and-silver diadem has rested atop Vlaakith's head for more than 900 years, serving as her badge of office and the means of testing any githyanki who would threaten her. Those who have beheld the crown say it twitches of its own volition, and that the 5,000-gp rubies that adorn the crown's spires look something like flickering eyes.

The crown has the following command-word activated powers:

Energy drain (Fortitude save, DC 23, negates).

Mass suggestion (Will save, DC 19, negates).

Control undead (Will save, DC 20, negates)

In addition, if the wearer of the *crown of corruption* touches the corpse of a creature killed by its *energy drain* attack, the corpse transforms in one of three ways. Each transformation takes 10 minutes.

Ritual of the Tl'a'ikith: The corpse rises as a tl'a'ikith under the control of the wearer of the crown.

Ritual of the Kr'y'izoth: The corpse rises as a kr'y'izoth under the control of the wearer of the crown.

Ritual of Death's Ichor: The corpse liquifies, then congeals into an ectoplasmic substance useful for magic item creation or spellcasting. Each corpse provides enough ectoplasm to count for (100×HD) experience points when making an item or paying the experience point cost of a spell.

The *crown of corruption* has 30 hit points. However, only a magic weapon with the holy and disrupting special qualities can damage it. If the *crown of corruption* is destroyed, all tl'a'ikiths and kr'y'izoths created by the crown are destroyed as well.

Caster Level: 25th; **Weight:** 3 lb.

SCEPTER OF EPHELOMON

This ruby-encrusted, dragon-shaped scepter was Ephelomon's gift to the githyanki centuries ago when the pact with red dragons was forged. Ephelomon gave the scepter to the first

Vlaakith (the current Vlaakith's ancestor), saying "go forth and conquer all."

The scepter has the following powers:

The bearer has total control over red dragons. Any red dragon who approaches within a half-mile of the scepter must succeed at a Will save (DC 35) or be affected as a *dominate monster* spell cast by a 30th-level caster.

The bearer is immune to fire and fear effects.

Once per week, the bearer can create a *gate* through which a very old red dragon flies (see the *Monster Manual* for the very old red dragon's statistics). The dragon must immediately make a Will save (DC 35) or serve the scepter-bearer without reward. Even if the dragon makes its save, it is considered controlled as described in the *gate* spell and may be ordered to fight the scepter-bearer's foes, or the dragon can bargain with the bearer of the scepter.

The *scepter of Ephelomon* has 60 hit points and can only be damaged by the claws of Bahamut or one of his chosen vassals, a magic weapon with the bane (evil dragons) special ability, or by the cold breath weapon of a good-aligned silver dragon. If the scepter is destroyed, the pact between the githyanki and the red dragons dissolves. The red dragons do not immediately turn against the githyanki, but only the most subservient ones continue to serve or assist the githyanki in any way. Red dragons in Vlaakith's service continue to serve the lich-queen out of fear, but not loyalty.

Caster Level: 30th; **Weight:** 5 lb.

DEATH TO VLAAKITH!

Assuming the PCs don't abandon their quest to destroy the lich-queen, the adventure can end in one of two ways: Either they succeed in destroying Vlaakith forever, or they perish heroically in the attempt. If the PCs destroy Vlaakith and her phylactery, the lich-queen is destroyed forever. Her demise triggers several events:

The earthquakes rocking Tu'narath cease as the One in the Void returns to a state of rest.

The Palace of Whispers releases all of its trapped souls. These souls burst from the walls of Susurru and depart for various outer planes. The obsidian turns brittle and, ten rounds later, the palace collapses in on itself, dealing 40d6 points of damage to any creature trapped within (Reflex save DC 30 for half damage). Only the great statue of Gith (see area 1) remains standing.

Githyanki everywhere lose their spell-like ability to *plane shift*. With the exception of warlocks and gish with access to the *plane shift* spell, githyanki on the Astral Plane are stranded and separated from their invasion forces and egg hatcheries on the Material Plane. Various githyanki warlords in Tu'narath and elsewhere are left to contemplate the future of a githyanki race, whose ability to travel the planes has been greatly diminished. They and the citizens of Tu'narath must also grieve for their fallen queen.

THE LICH-
QUEEN'S
BELOVED



Vlaakith's rise to godhood does not come without cost. Quakes shatter the dead god into several pieces, and more than half of Tu'narath's population perishes in the devastation. However, word of Vlaakith's ascendance begins spreading to every corner of every plane, and the githyanki people enjoy a period of exultation matched by the nearly overwhelming desire to crush their pitiful enemies in their goddess's unhallowed name.

Ancient prophecies foretell that when things look bleakest for the githyanki people, Gith will return to save her people from despair. The reappearance of this legendary champion-turned-demigod might serve as grist for an epic-level campaign, possibly centered on the reunification of the githyanki and githzerai people, the appearance of the first githyanki clerics, and a gith holy war against the ancient empires of the illithids.

Until Gith returns, the githyanki must find a new leader to replace Vlaakith. Although Zetch'r'r has the charisma to gain a political foothold, some of his beliefs are radical and unpopular, and he has many competent rivals. Conflicts between power-hungry warlords leave the githyanki people in turmoil for years to come. The githyanki invasion of the Material Plane comes to a gradual end as githyanki forces retreat, regroup, and fortify their faction strongholds.

Zetch'r'r honors any deal he made with the PCs, if only to avoid the fate that befell Vlaakith. He vows to use his influence to stop any further githyanki incursions on the heroes' world, and he takes great pains not to cross paths with the PCs in the future.

VLAAKITH LIVES!

If the PCs fail to destroy the lich-queen and her phylactery, she will eventually achieve godhood by capturing the divine spark of the One in the Void. From that point forward, githyanki may become clerics of Vlaakith. The lich-queen bequeaths spells to her loyal worshipers from the domains of Chaos, Destruction, and Evil.

VLAAKITH THE LICH-QUEEN

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 180 (24d8 + 72)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	22 (+6)	16 (+3)	30 (+10)	16 (+3)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +13, Int +17, Wis +10

Skills Arcana +17, History +17, Insight +10, Perception +10, Stealth +13

Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic

Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Gith
Challenge 23 (50,000 XP)

Dancing Silver Greatsword. As a bonus action, Vlaakith tosses her silver greatsword into the air, where it makes two attacks against a creature of her choice that she can see within 30 feet of her. Each round on her turn, she can use a bonus action to have the sword make two attacks on a creature she can see within 30 feet of her, or to call the sword back to her hands.

Fear Aura. Any creature hostile to Vlaakith that starts its turn within 20 feet of her must make a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw, unless she is incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to Vlaakith's Fear Aura for the next 24 hours.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Vlaakith fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Rejuvenation. If Vlaakith is destroyed, she gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all her hit points and becoming active again. Her new body appears within 5 feet of her phylactery.

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). Vlaakith's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 25, +17 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *mage hand* (the hand is invisible)

3/day each: *jump*, *misty step*, *nondetection* (self only), *tongues*

1/day each: *plane shift*, *telekinesis*

Spellcasting. Vlaakith is a 20th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 25, +17 to

hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *unseen servant*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *enhance ability*, *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *web*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *haste*, *lightning bolt*, *magic circle*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*

5th level (3 slots): *hold monster*, *screaming*, *wall of force*

6th level (2 slots): *disintegrate*, *eyebite*, *globe of invulnerability*

7th level (2 slots): *finger of death*

8th level (1 slot): *dominate monster*, *power word stun*

9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*, *wish*

Turn Resistance. Vlaakith has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Vlaakith makes two silver greatsword attacks.

Silver Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) psychic damage. This is a magic weapon attack. On a critical hit against a target in an astral body (as with the *astral projection* spell), Vlaakith can cut the silvery cord that tethers the target to its material body, instead of dealing damage.

Paralyzing Touch. *Melee Spell Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) cold damage. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Vlaakith can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Vlaakith regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Silver Greatsword. Vlaakith makes a silver greatsword attack, whether the weapon is in hand or dancing.

Paralyzing Touch (Costs 2 Actions). Vlaakith uses her Paralyzing Touch.

Frightening Gaze (Costs 2 Actions). Vlaakith fixes her gaze on one creature she can see within 10 feet of her. The target must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or become frightened for 1 minute. The frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to Vlaakith's gaze for the next 24 hours.

Streaming Highlights

This issue's media highlights include villains with a heart, a well-wicked wiki and the universe's most dangerous birdcage.



TRAPPED IN THE BIRDCAGE

“Trapped in the Birdcage is about four clueless berks stuck on the streets of the Cage, also known as Sigil. They’ve been conscripted to help Crone, a were-raven who acts as the protector of Sigil’s weak and needy,” says DM Holly Conrad.

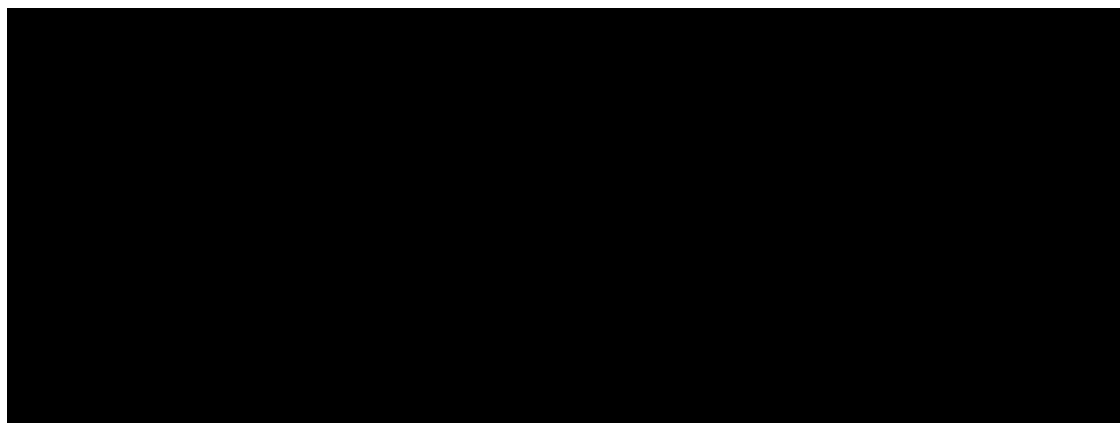
“Sigil is in the center of the multiverse and filled with countless dangers, especially to those not in the know. And there is not a lot this group knows. Whether it be setting friends on fire in rugs, stealing from every cutter they can see or disposing of dead bodies, you should watch just to see how long it takes for them to get mazed.”

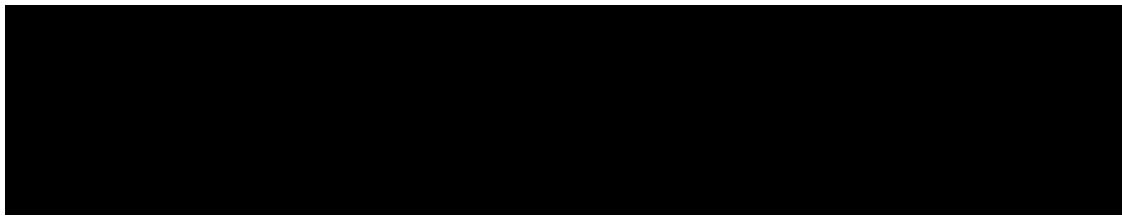
Trapped in the Birdcage streams on [the official D&D Twitch channel](#) from 5-7pm Pacific Standard Time on Thursdays.

DICE CAMERA ACTION

If you thought [the sock puppet roundup](#) for Dice! Camera! Action! told you everything you'd need to know about Chris Perkins' game, prepare to be amazed. Sean McGovern is building a wiki containing detailed summaries of each episode, with links to every NPC and location.

“Really, this is one big campaign summary, which is something I enjoy doing for my own games. Right now I’m loading it up with details,” he tells *Dragon+*. “I just finished a complete table of every guest star, their characters, and when they appeared. For the record, Rachel Seeley has made the most appearances on the show, which is especially impressive when you factor in that Chris really tried to kill her once per episode.”





McGovern wants the wiki to serve a few different purposes: to keep people up to speed; to help people unfamiliar with D&D to understand some of the deeper lore connections; and to provide facts to base their theories and predictions on.

“As I detail the summaries, I’m fleshing out the character bios, adding in items the heroes have acquired and key moments in their adventuring lives, like the time Diath drank Saint Markovia’s ashes. The thing I am the most excited about is making big pages which collect everything we know about certain topics,” he adds.

That material includes:

Gutter: Diath’s sword, which summons Shemeshka the Marauder. There’s a keyhole in the sword and Diath had a mysterious key ring given to him long ago. For some reason, those keys fit in the lock on the hilt of Gutter.

The Skizzixes: Everything we know about this band of tieflings linked to Strix.

The Saints of Lathander: Over the course of the series, Evelyn has been interacting with saints (mostly from *Curse of Strahd*). When you step back and look at those interactions as a whole, you can see that Lathander has something up his sleeve for Evelyn, and it’s probably going to be awesome.

Fans of Chris Perkins will also be treated to a page all about the celebrity DM. “I have this huge history of all things Perkins that I dug up years ago for an article on my blog,” McGovern explains. “It’s got info on Monte Cook’s *Praemal* and *Ptolus* campaigns, notes on his Dungeon Master Experience column, and a list of some of his most notable adventures from all editions—although I am still trying to find any info at all on his RPGA adventure *Planescape Cutters*). I also stuck in a section of ‘fun facts’, because I wanted to write about his rejected adventure, *Kevin Wickerlock’s Whimsical Adventure*.”

Read more on [the wiki for Dice! Camera! Action!](#)

DARK AND DICEY

Can there be such a thing as an uplifting villain campaign? “Dark and Dicey features characters who have all gone through the proverbial ringer and been cast out from society,” says Kaiji Tang. “Yet each of their desires come from a pure place in their hearts, whether it be regaining lost ones, saving an entire nation or finally coming to terms with the monster within.”

The party comprises a kenku named Pluck (played by Nathan Han), the lightfoot halfling Trixa (Anna Brisbin), half-elf oathbreaker paladin Kovacs (Hunter Hughes), yuanti pure-blood Anya (Cristina Vee) and Deep Gnome Werblund (Zach Callison). They’ll travel the Blacksteel Isles trying to find answers to each of their personal hardships, while coming face to face with a tyrannical mageocracy that seeks to crush the disenfranchised and impoverished under their heels.

Will our villains be able to cast off the past and embrace their future? Could there be redemption? Or is looting from nobles just too much fun?

You can [learn more about the new show here](#) and watch on Mondays at 7pm PST starting May 14, 2018 on [the official D&D Twitch channel](#).

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Unearthed Arcana: Order Domain

Mike Mearls introduces a new cleric order that prizes obedience to the law above all else...

Mike Mearls



Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

This month, Unearthed Arcana presents a new playtest option for clerics: the Order Domain. An early draft of this **appeared on the**

[Twitch show *The Mike Mearls Happy Fun Hour*](#). We've refined that draft into the version available here.

Later this month, a survey on these options will appear on the D&D website. Please try them out and let us know what you think.

Access the full details of these rules governing your daily ventures across the Forgotten Realms by downloading the PDF.

[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

To see the full treasure trove of Unearthed Arcana articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, [visit the archive here](#).

Have a request for Unearthed Arcana? Follow [@mikemearls](#) on [Twitter](#) and let him know.

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Unearthed Arcana: Order Domain

This document presents a playtest option for the cleric: the Order Domain.

This Is Unofficial Content

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game design and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

Divine Domain

At 1st level, a cleric gains the Divine Domain feature. At the DM's discretion, the following domain option is available to a cleric, in addition to those offered in the *Player's Handbook*.

Order Domain

The Order domain represents discipline, as well as service to a society or an institution, whether that service is rendered in obedience to or enforcement of the law—civil, religious, or both. Gods on many worlds grant access to this domain, including Bane, Tyr, Majere, Erathis, Pholtus, Wee Jas, Aureon, Maglubiyet, Nuada, Athena, Anubis, Forseti, and Asmodeus.

The ideal of order is obedience to the law above all else, rather than to a specific individual or the passing influence of emotion or popular rule. Clerics of order are typically concerned with how things are done, rather than whether an action's results are just. Following the law and obeying its edicts is critical, especially when it benefits these clerics and their deities.

More importantly, law establishes hierarchies. Those selected by the law to lead must be obeyed. Those who obey must do so to the best of their ability. In this manner, law creates an intricate web of obligations that allows society to forge order and security in a chaotic multiverse.

Order Domain Features

Cleric Level	Feature
1st	Bonus Proficiency, Voice of Authority
2nd	Channel Divinity: Order's Demand
6th	Order's Dominion
8th	Divine Strike
17th	Order's Wrath

Domain Spells

You gain domain spells at the cleric levels listed in the Order Domain Spells table. See the Divine Domain class feature for how domain spells work.

Order Domain Spells

Cleric Level	Spells
1st	<i>command, heroism</i>
3rd	<i>enhance ability, hold person</i>
5th	<i>mass healing word, slow</i>
7th	<i>compulsion, locate creature</i>
9th	<i>commune, dominate person</i>

Bonus Proficiency

When you choose this domain at 1st level, you gain proficiency with heavy armor.

Voice of Authority

Starting at 1st level, you can invoke the power of law to drive an ally to attack. Immediately after you cast a spell on an ally using a spell slot of 1st level or higher, that ally can use their reaction to make one weapon attack against a target of your choice that you can see. If the spell targets more than one ally, you choose the ally who can make the attack.

Channel Divinity: Order's Demand

Starting at 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to exert an intimidating presence over others.

As an action, you present your holy symbol, and each creature of your choice that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by you until the end of your next turn or until the charmed creature takes any damage. You can

also cause any of the charmed creatures to fall prone when they fail the saving throw.

Order's Dominion

At 6th level, you become extraordinarily adept at channeling magical energy to compel others.

When you cast a spell of the enchantment school using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you regain one expended spell slot. The slot you regain must be of a level lower than the spell you cast and can't be higher than 5th level.

Divine Strike

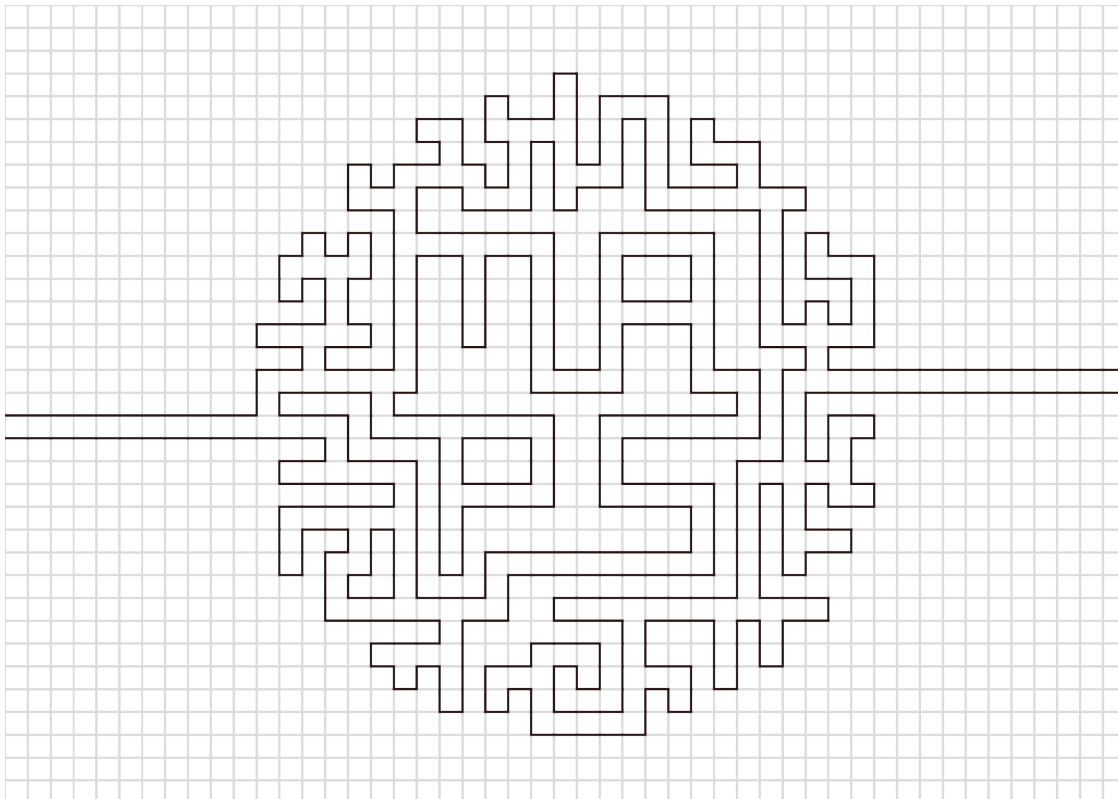
At 8th level, you gain the ability to infuse your weapon strikes with divine energy. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d8 force damage to the target. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d8.

Order's Wrath

Starting at 17th level, enemies you designate for destruction wilt under the combined efforts of you and your allies. If you deal your Divine Strike damage to a creature, that creature takes an extra 2d8 force damage the first time each turn that any ally of yours hits it with a weapon attack. This benefit lasts until the start of your next turn.

Maps of the Month

Further maps from *Tomb of Annihilation*, plus a look back at Drizzt's past adventures!

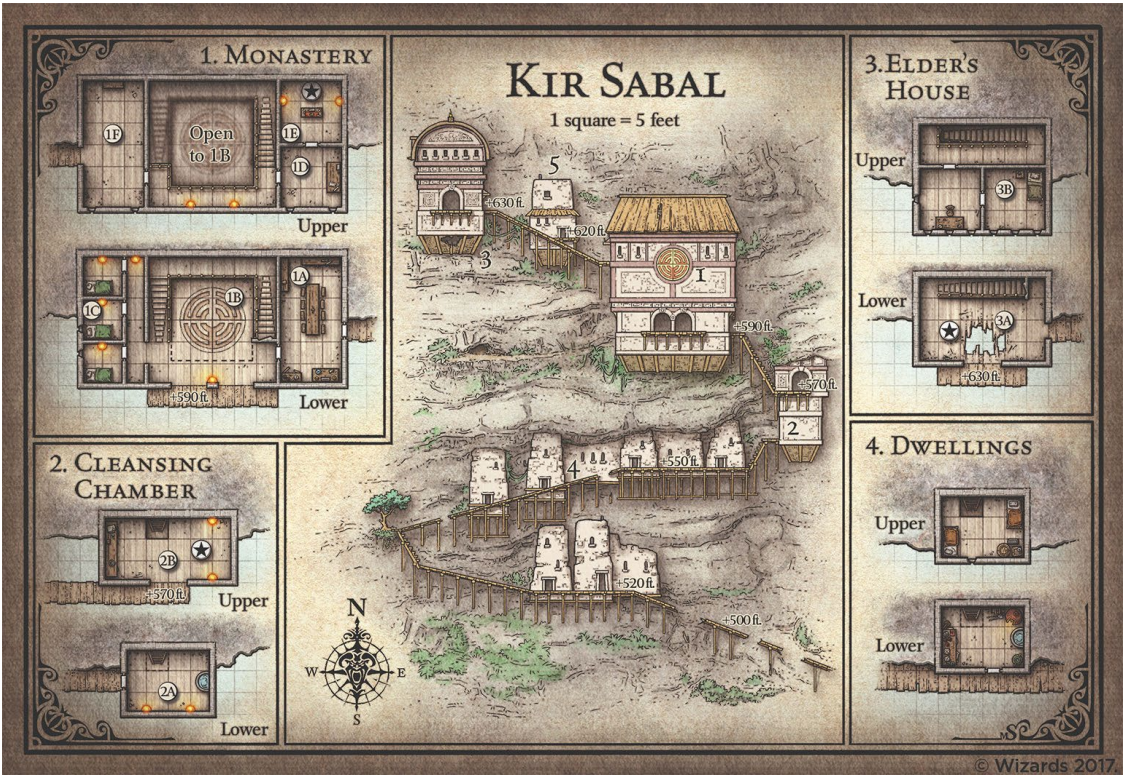


*WARNING: THESE MAPS MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS FOR
BALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS, EBERRON:
RISING FROM THE LAST WAR, AND EXTRA LIFE:
INFERNAL MACHINE REBUILD.*

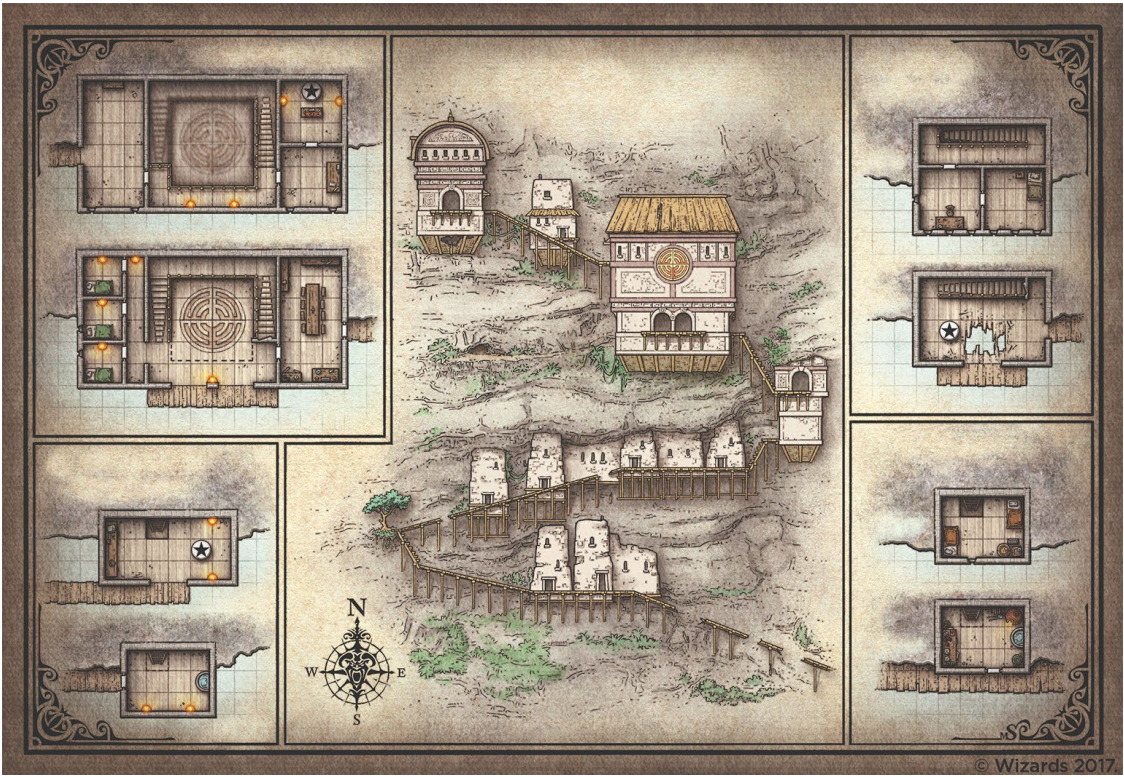
We're pleased to offer a final selection of maps to help round out your collection from *Tomb of Annihilation*. In addition, with this issue's coverage of R.A. Salvatore and Drizzt, we also wanted to present further maps related to the drow—with his involvement in the *Out of the Abyss* campaign and from the Underdark!

TOMB OF ANNIHILATION

Kir Sabal

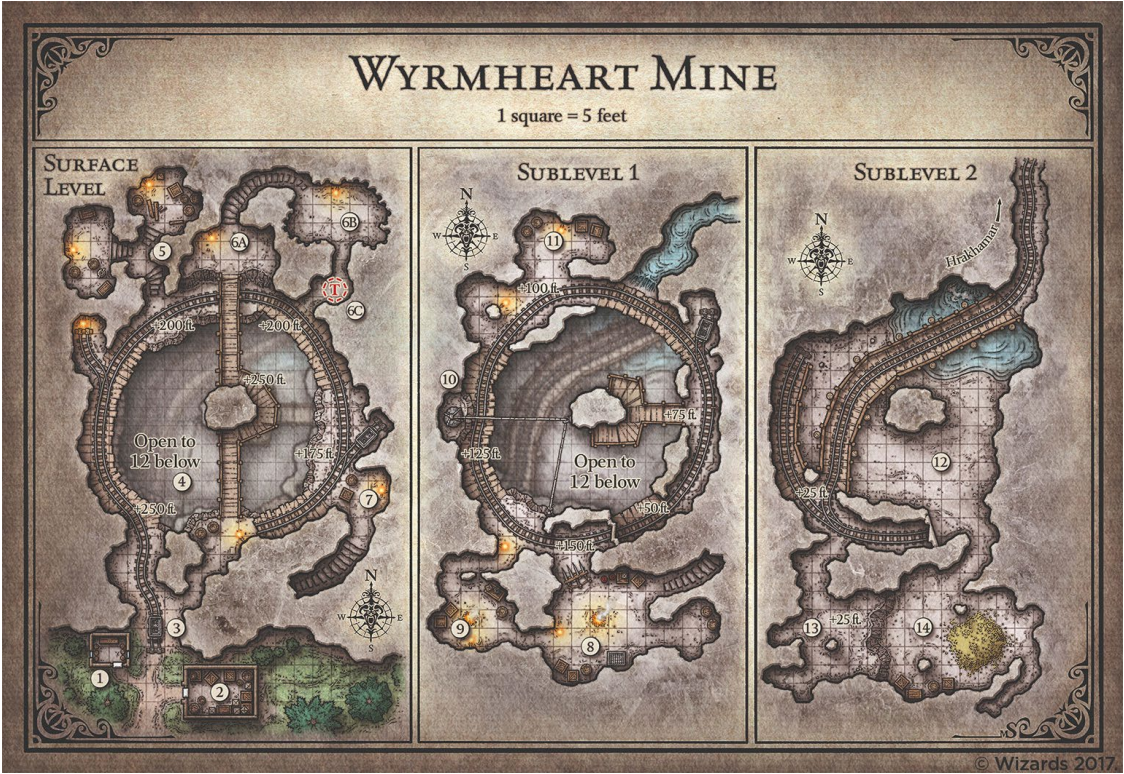


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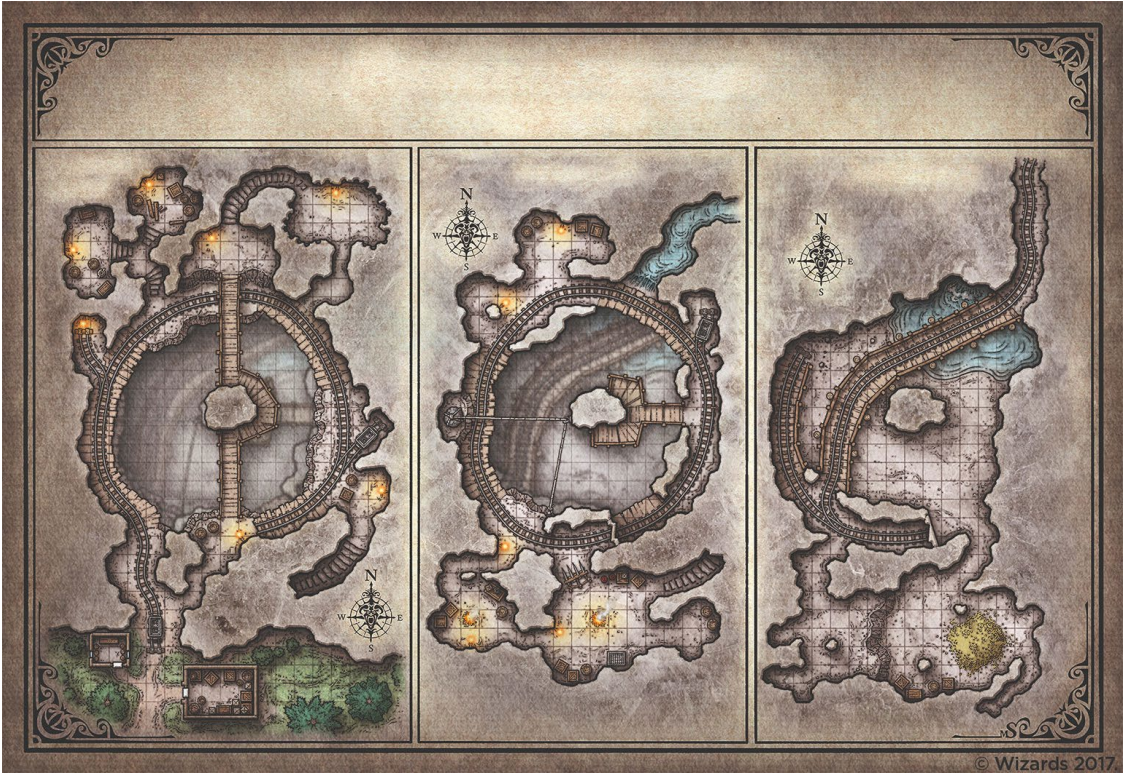


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Wurmheart Mine

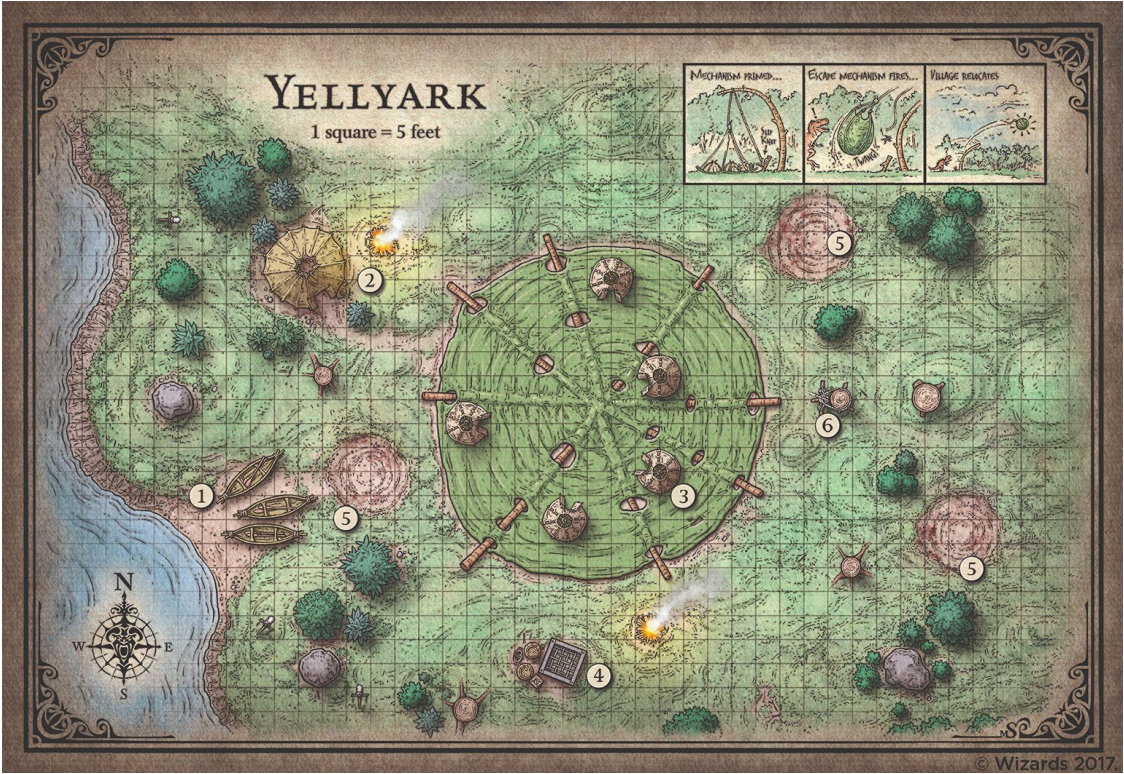


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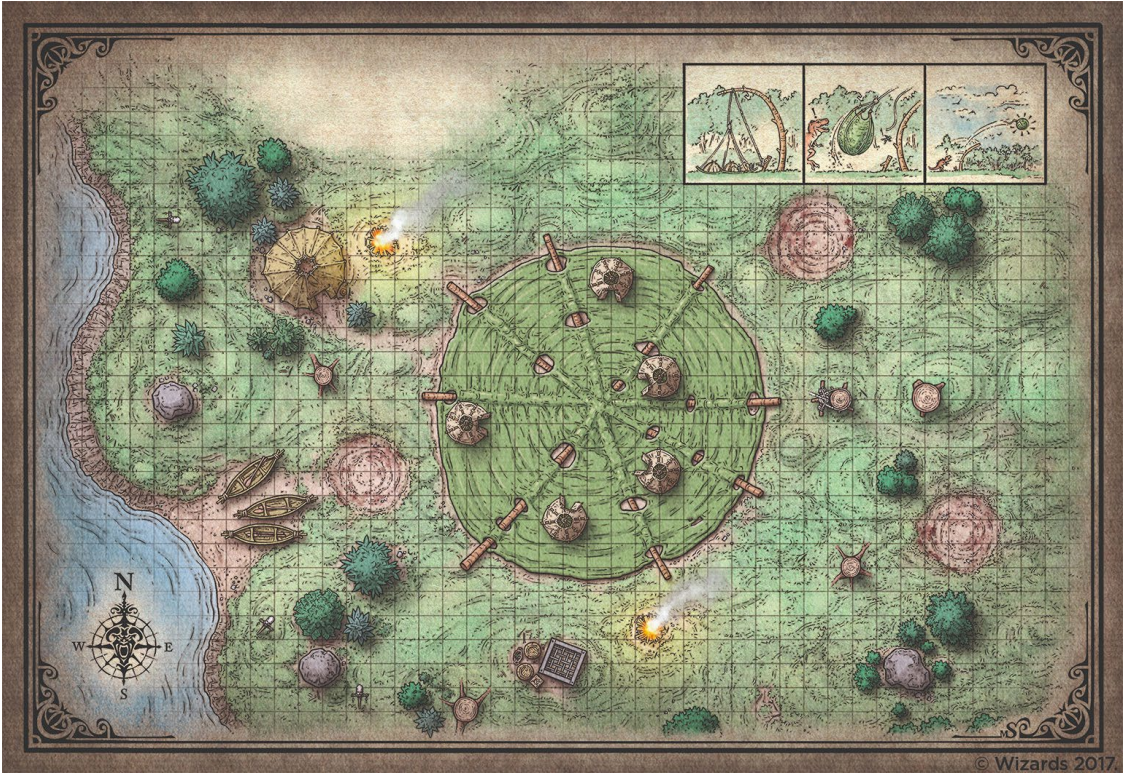


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Yellyark

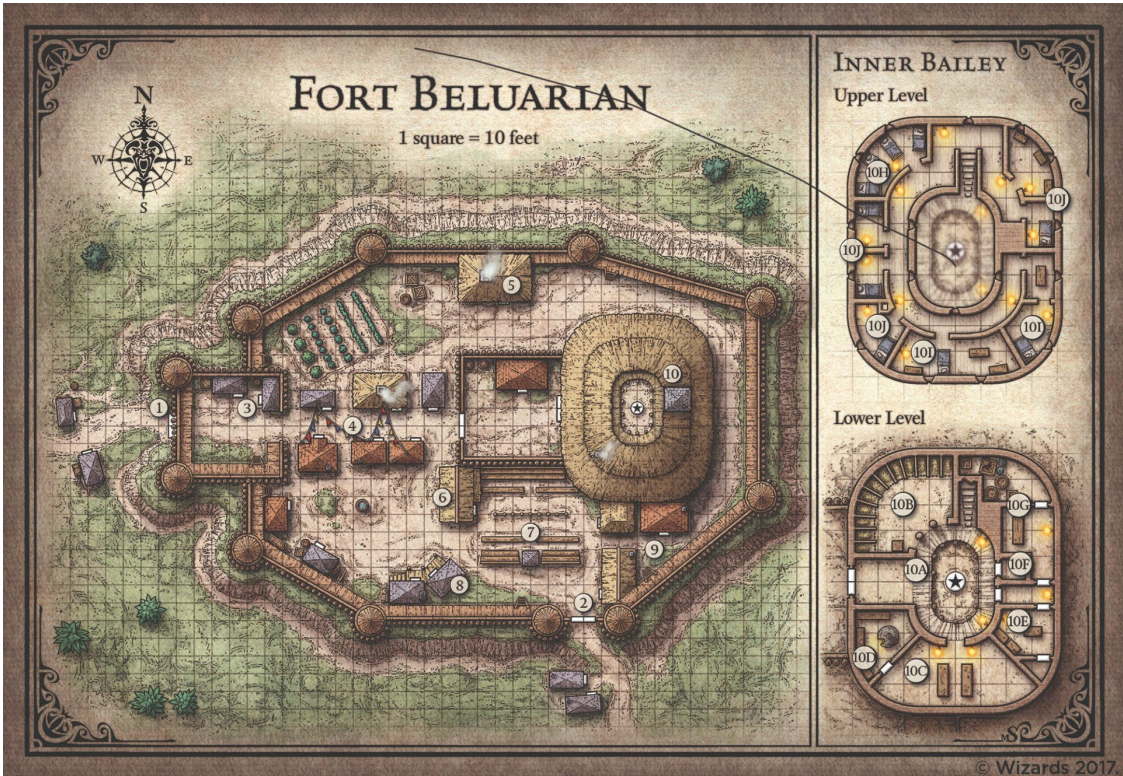


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Fort Beluarian



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OUT OF THE ABYSS

The Worm Nursery



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Gracklstugh

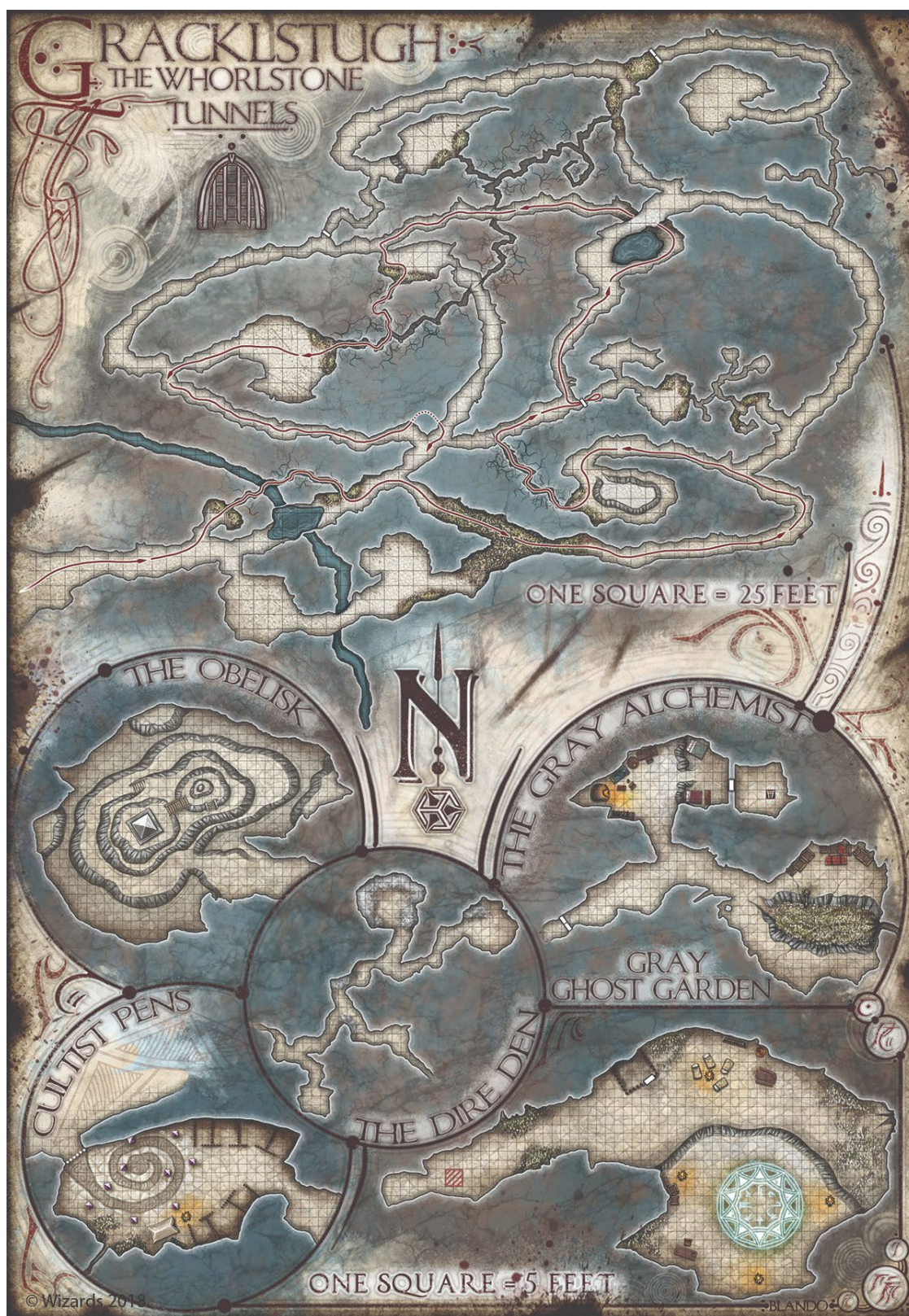


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Gracklstugh: the Whorlstone Tunnels



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Mantol-Derith



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DRIZZT

Menzoberranzan



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Underdark Caverns



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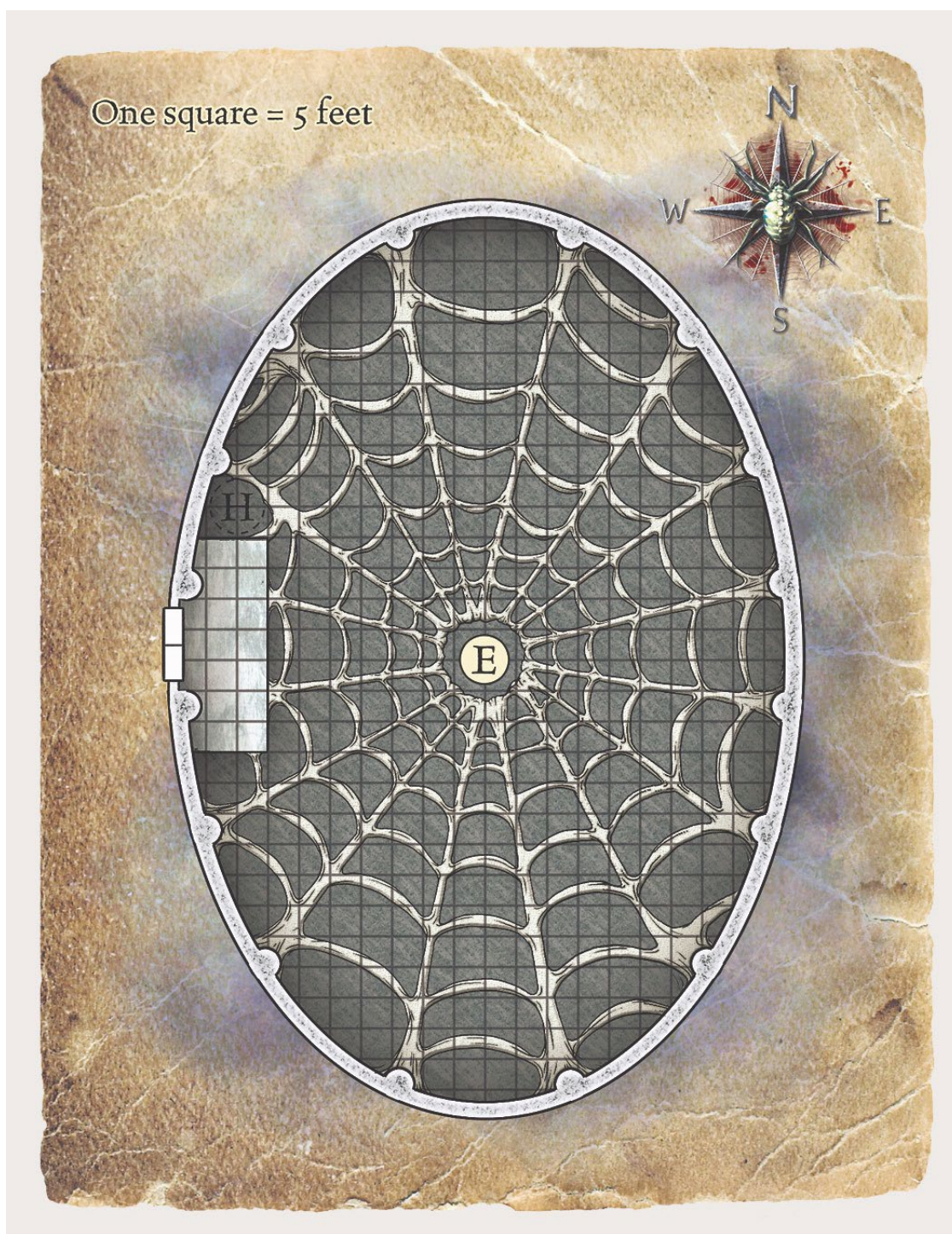
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Underdark Tunnels



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Audience Chamber



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DIGITAL MAPS

Please note that *Tomb of Annihilation* and *Out of the Abyss* can be found at **Fantasy Grounds** and the **Roll20** virtual tabletop. Look for

these adventures available now!

CARTOGRAPHERS

And as always, our appreciation goes out to our amazing cartographers; this issue, these include **Mike Schley** and **Jared Blando**.



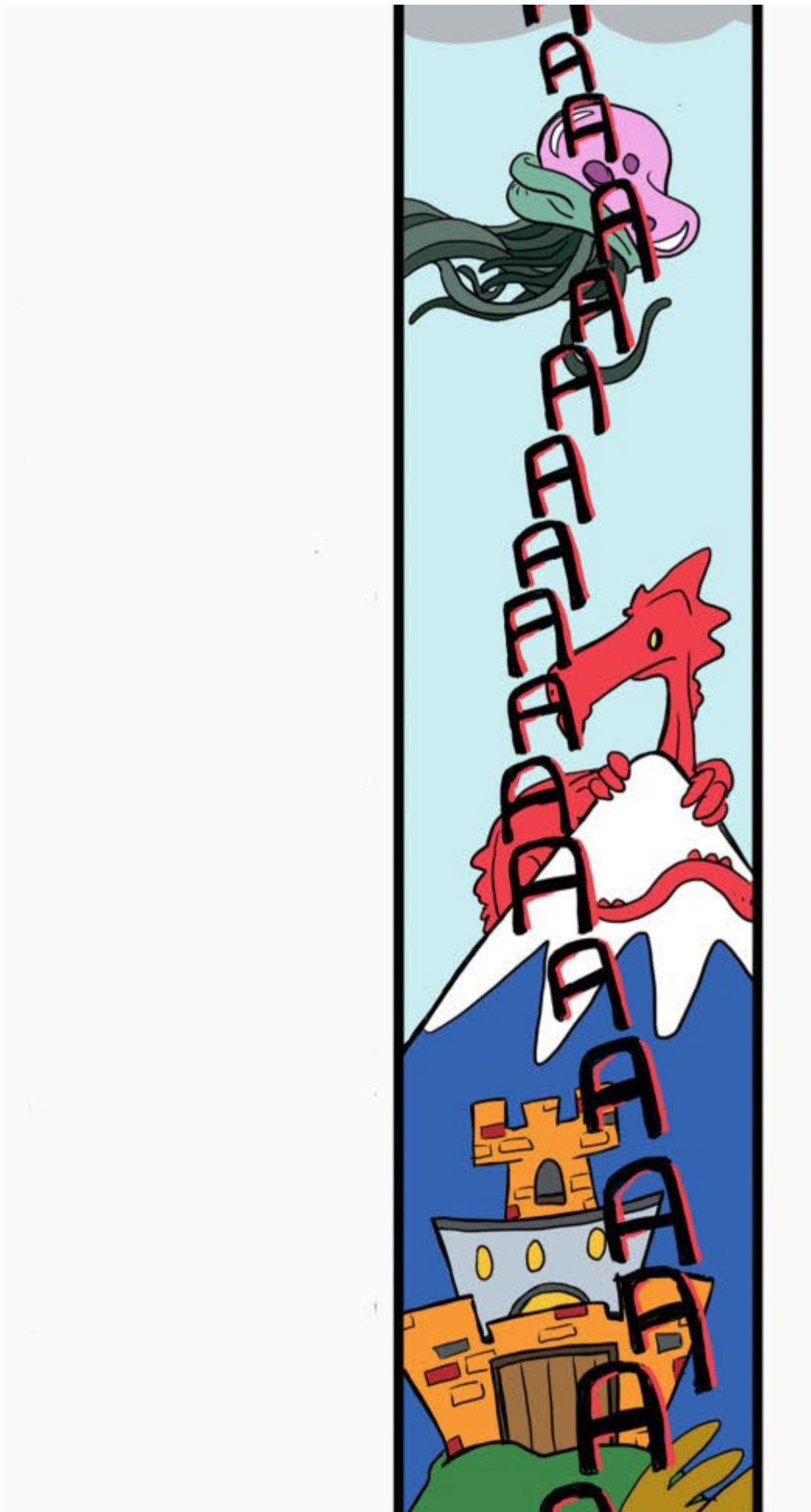
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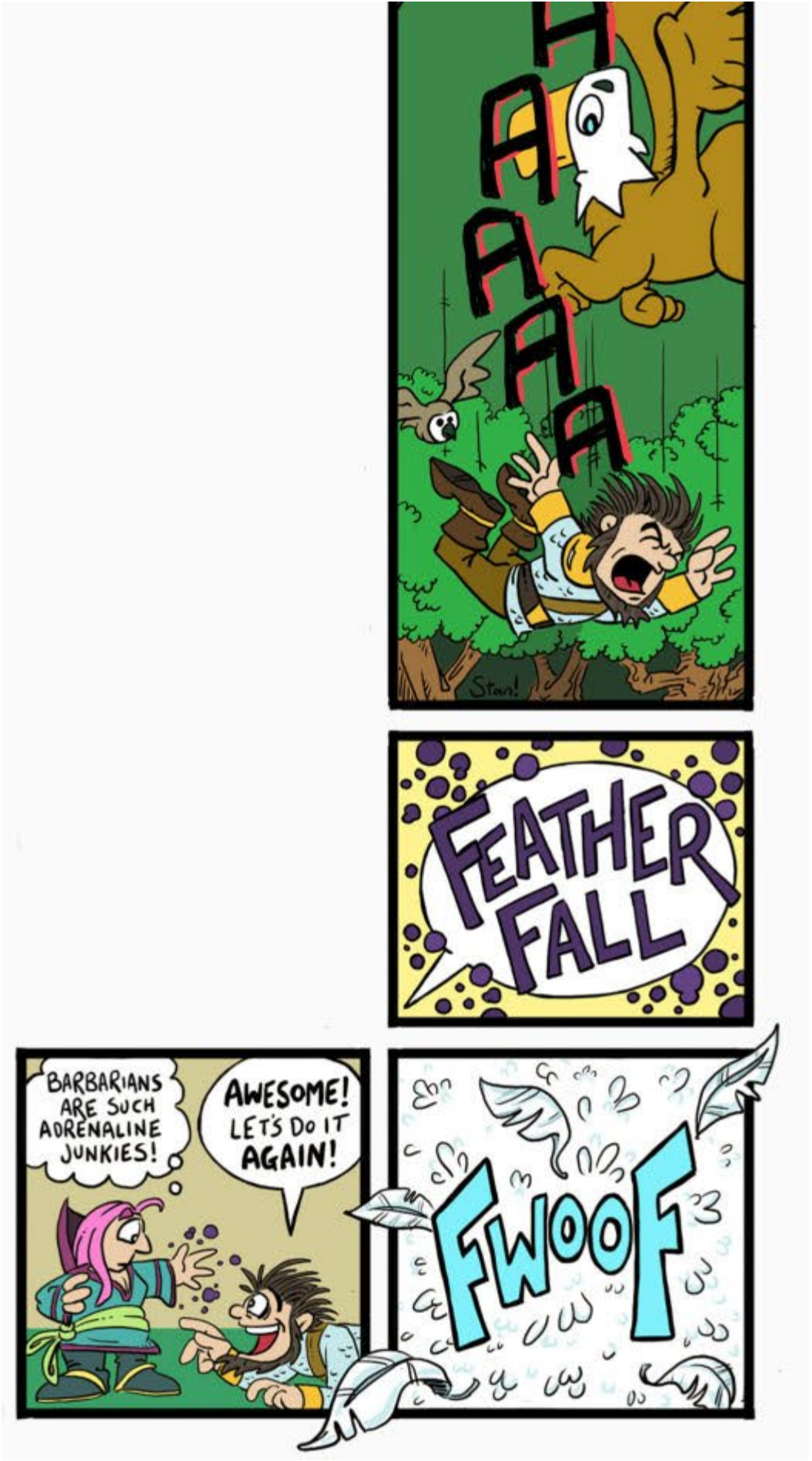
Comic: D&D Toons

Artist Stan! offers his take on the demise of a
dungeon delver...

Best known as Stan!, and working as author, cartoonist, game designer, and raconteur par excellence. Among a great many projects, Stan! created 10'x10' Toons, The Littlest Shoggoth, and helped create the Dragon+ Dungeons & Doodles livestream (see below). Find out more at Stannex.com.







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Next Issue: Dragon+ 20

Join our stream of consciousness in the next exciting edition of *Dragon+*!



We're all about the livestreams in issue 20 of Dragon+. We'll be chatting with Maze Arcana's Satine Phoenix, Destiny & Doom's Lauren Urban, Dice, Camera, Action!'s Chris Perkins, Force Grey's Matt Mercer, Girls Guts Glory's Kelly D'Angelo, Trapped in the Birdcage's Holly Conrad and Dark and Dicey's Kaiji Tang. We'll also be highlighting charity games that are as fun as they are worthy, as we look ahead to this year's Extra Life events.



Elsewhere, we'll get a little arty as we interview not one but two cover artists, before master painter Dan Gelon shows us how to do justice to WizKids' latest troll figure.

There's all this, plus more exclusive previews, another delve into the

imposing *Dragon* archive, and all our regulars like maps of the month, a selection of the best content from the DMs Guild, and much more!



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